

## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 1

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 11 – The Firebolt

Harry sat there watching Professor McGonagall walking out the portrait hole carrying the greatest broom in the world – his firebolt that he'd owned for a few short hours. He watched one of his best friends scream at the other, "What did you go running to McGonagall for?"

Harry knew that was a good question. Hermione had never turned him in for anything, even before they were friends. He knew she wasn't mad at him, so there had to be a reason. He just couldn't see it.

Hermione threw her book aside. She was pink in the face, but stood up and faced Ron defiantly. "Because I thought – and Professor McGonagall agrees with me – that that broom was probably sent to Harry by Sirius Black!"

"What?" exclaimed Harry, shocked, "How could he?"

"There's no way!" shouted Ron. "You're just jealous!"

"Jealous?" retorted Hermione, her face turning red with anger. "Why? I don't even like flying!"

"That someone would spend that much on Harry and not you!" Ron shouted back.

"I AM NOT..." shouted Hermione, now furious with Ron.

"STOP! Both of you!" shouted Harry, earning glares from both Ron and Hermione. He then calmly said, "It's my broom, Ron. If anyone's gonna yell at Hermione about it, I will."

"Fine!" said Ron. "You're right! Go ahead and yell at her for running to..."

“Ron,” said Harry firmly, “Hermione has been our best friend for over two years. I think she deserves the right to explain herself. I don’t think she’d turn in the broom out of jealousy.” He then turned at Hermione, who appeared nervous but pleased that Harry was willing to listen. “Before I yell at you Hermione,” he said calmly, “I want to understand why you believe Sirius Black sent me that broom.”

At this point Ron’s face turned bright red as he shouted, “I can’t believe you’re listening to that traitor!” and stormed out of the room.

She appeared very nervous. “Well, Harry,” she said while looking down, “Sirius Black is out to get you, and this would be the perfect way.” She then began looking him in the eye. “If he’s hexed the broom to throw you off the way Professor Quirrel did in first year, it’d look like an accident. You’ve already fallen off a broom once this year, and I for one don’t want it to happen again.” Tears began falling down her cheeks at this point, but she kept looking straight at him. “I’m sorry that I did it behind your back, and, er, if that means you’re mad at me, I, er, guess that’s how it is. Your life means more to me than your friendship.”

At that moment she ran toward the stairs that led to the girls’ dorm. Harry easily caught up with her before she reached them. He gently grabbed her shoulders and turned her around. They locked eyes for about ten seconds before he smiled at her and said, “You haven’t lost my friendship, Hermione. I know you did what you did because you care about me.” He then gave her a quick embrace, which caused a big smile to form on Hermione’s face. He looked a little nervous as he released her. “That, er, means a lot to me.”

“Thank you for understanding, Harry. What are we gonna do about Ron?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said miserably. “He seems to bring out the worst in me.”

“He just needs to grow up a little,” Hermione giggled.

“What’s so funny?” asked a confused Harry.

“I was just imagining how loud he’d scream at me if I told him to grow up. But then again, when isn’t he yelling at me?”

“The only reason we don’t argue is because I let him talk about quidditch all the time,” Harry chuckled. “Don’t get me wrong, I like quidditch, but really, there’s a lot more to life than a game.”

“Things like friendship and trust.”

“Exactly.”

Hermione gave her friend an appraising look. “That seems awful grown up, Harry.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe facing Voldemort twice, having a killer after you, and nearly dying from a fall will get you to start thinking about things besides games.” He sighed. “I’ve been thinking about what’s important to me, and I know that you’re a whole lot more important than any broomstick to me.”

She smiled brightly at him. “I’m glad to hear it. You mean more than a broomstick to me, too.”

He smiled back. “I know I mean more than a broomstick to you, but what about your books?”

She chuckled and said, “Which books? My divination book, yes. Hogwarts, a History, maybe...”

“Want to take a walk?” Harry asked.

“All right. Maybe we can build a snow person.”

They got their coats, hats, and gloves from their dorms, and met back downstairs within five minutes. Harry helped her through the portrait hole, and subconsciously took her hand. They walked hand in hand through the castle, out into the grounds, found a good spot, and built a snowman when Harry insisted he’d be too embarrassed to make it a woman. They wound up hanging together a lot during the rest of the break since Ron was still mad at Hermione for turning the broom in and Harry for speaking to Hermione. Ron ended up being miserable

for the holidays while Harry and Hermione were happy. Harry found himself thinking about Hermione often when they weren't together, and wondered if he was starting to 'like' her as more than a friend.

The holidays were ending as more students started arriving back at the school. Harry and Hermione decided on the last day of term to go for another walk, hand in hand, the day before term started. They were talking amiably until they heard a familiar sneering voice shout, "Hey Potter, holding hands with the mudblood? Surely a celebrity like you can do better than that!"

Harry released her hand, grabbed his wand, and stepped in front of Hermione. "It's none of your business, Malfoy, so get out of here!"

"Not very friendly, are you?" he shot back.

"Get out of here, Dracula, son of Lucifer!" yelled Hermione with a smile on her face.

"How dare you speak to me, you filthy mudblood!"

Hermione stepped around Harry to face Draco. "Can't you come up with anything to call me besides mudblood? I can come up with a lot of things to call you, such as foul, evil, lying devil. Son of a Death Eater. Arrogant, cocky git! Ridiculous self-important nothing! Stupid coward! Idiotic little boy who can't think for himself, who's been told by his daddy that he's important because of something he had no control over, even though he's never accomplished anything for himself except for getting mediocre grades! Losers like you brag about your parentage because you know you'll never accomplish anything yourself!"

While this was going on, Harry was watching her with admiration while his wand was pointed at Draco, just in case.

Draco, whose face was falling, looked like he was on the verge of tears, finally shouted, "I don't have to listen to you, mudblood!" and ran off.

Harry started laughing and turned to the girl beside him. Without thinking he hugged her and kissed her cheek saying, "That was

bloody brilliant!" and looked in her eyes again as she blushed. When he realized what he'd done, he blushed too. "I'm, er, sorry."

"You're sorry that you kissed me?" said Hermione with a smile, knowing she was embarrassing Harry. "I'm not."

"Y-You're not?" stuttered Harry. "W-What if I'd kissed your lips?"

Hermione was blushing even more than before. "I wouldn't have been sorry if you'd done that either."

Harry took a deep breath. "I-I'm not sure what's been happening to me, lately. I've been wanting to do that for about a week. I-I've been starting to kinda like you, er, as a girl."

She replied quickly, "Well, I am a girl, and well, I've kind of started liking you as a boy."

"You have?"

"Yes."

They stood there and stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity. It was at least thirty seconds, until Hermione nervously broke the silence. "If you would like to kiss me, g-go ahead."

"I, well I've just never kissed..."

"I know. Me either."

They slowly moved their faces together, managing to bump their noses together three times until Harry suggested Hermione stay still. They'll never be able to describe the sensations they felt when their lips finally met, but they liked it. Hermione said, "That was nice, but I think we should practice."

They were still 'practicing' when Ron, walking with Neville, came upon them. Ron shouted, "I don't believe it!" causing Harry and Hermione, who both started blushing, to break apart.

Neville said, "Excuse me," as he went bright red and got away from there as fast as he could.

Hermione glared at Ron. "What don't you believe, Ron?"

"Harry, how could you kiss, er, Hermione?" said Ron, inserting his foot deeper into his mouth.

"Why shouldn't I kiss her?" asked Harry, getting annoyed.

"She's, she's Hermione. I mean, no one wants to kiss..."

"Ron," said Harry, "for your safety I would suggest you stop talking now."

"Why should I?" said Ron, getting angry. "I know why you're kissing her! You figure that since no one else wants her she'll let you take advantage..."

"SINCE NO ONE ELSE WANTS ME?" shouted Hermione, causing Ron to take a step backwards, "TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ME?"

At this point Harry shrugged his shoulders and quickly said, "I tried to warn you," while he took a step away from them, pulling his wand out in case the fight got out of control.

Harry wasn't the only one pulling out their wand. Hermione shouted, "How dare you say no one wants me! I don't see any girls lining up to date you! I know I never will!"

Ron turned a shade of purple that reminded Harry of his Uncle Vernon before shouting back, "As if I'd want you to..."

"Petrificus Totalus!" shouted Hermione, causing Ron to fall face first in the snow as he experienced the full Body-Bind."

"Hermione, that's enough," said Harry. "Calm down."

She looked back at Harry, took a deep breath and said, "I know. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have lost my temper. It's just..." At that moment she

started crying. “It’s just I know part of what he said is true. I know I’m plain and my hair...”

“Stop talking about my girlfriend like that,” Harry said as he walked up to her. “I like you just the way you are, and I don’t think you’re plain. I, er, think you’re pretty.” He then pulled her into a tight embrace and held her close for about a minute. Then he pushed them apart just enough so he could wipe away her tears with his left hand while his right hand was still on her back. He then kissed her on the lips once more. “I think you’d better release Ron before a teacher finds him.”

After she performed the counter curse on Ron, he glared at the two of them. Harry said, “Hermione and I are going out, and you’re going to have to accept it if you want to hang out with us.” Without saying a word, Ron turned around and walked away.

“I wonder if he’ll ever speak to us again,” said Hermione.

“That, Hermione,” said Harry, taking her hands in his, “is up to him.”

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## Chapter 2 – Angels and Devils

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 11 – The Firebolt

The portrait hole opened and Ron came storming inside, his face red and his eyes looking ready to kill. He was headed toward the boys' dormitory when he heard a female voice calling out, "Hey Ron, what's wrong?"

He stopped, turned around, and snarled, "Nothing Ginny! Leave me alone!"

His sister walked up to him and shouted, "I am not the person you're mad at, so I'd appreciate it if you didn't treat me like I am!"

Ron took a deep breath. "Fine, I'm sorry. It's just Harry and Hermione!"

"What about them?" asked Ginny, now obviously curious. "You spent the holidays here to keep Harry company."

"They've been ignoring me since Christmas, and now I just caught them kissing!"

"Kissing?" asked Ginny with her brow furrowed and a frown on her face. "But I thought they were just friends."

"That's what I thought, too!" snarled Ron. "When I caught them, Hermione hexed me."

"Hexed you?"

"Yeah! Can you believe it! She put me in the full Body-Bind and they kissed over me before they finally released me!"

Ginny was getting furious. Her face was getting as red as her hair. "I can't believe they'd! That Hermione would! That Harry! To think I used to like that git! Oh, we need to get back at them!"

"Yeah," said Ron, "But how?"

"We'll think of something!" said Ginny forcefully. "Maybe we can get some help from Fred and George. In the meantime Ron, just ignore them!"

"All right, Ginny," said Ron. "But how am I gonna pass my classes without Hermione's help?"

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Classes resumed the next day. Harry and Hermione were a little saddened that neither Ron nor Ginny would speak to them, but were not going to apologize for liking each other. Harry guessed that Ginny was mad at them because she still had a crush on him. Whenever they'd show any affection, holding hands, hugging, or occasional kissing around either of the red-headed siblings they'd get dirty looks from them. When they'd notice these glares, Hermione would simply say to Harry, "Ignore them!"

Ignoring them is exactly what they did for a week until Saturday morning. Harry was eating his breakfast in the Great Hall, sitting next to Hermione, when George Weasley walked up in between them and said with a smile on his face, "Oi! Hello you two. I heard you started dating."

Harry answered, "Yeah Fred. That's right, and I've never been happier," while putting his right arm around his girlfriend.

"I'm sure you both are," said Fred. "Congratulations. I'm sorry about how our much younger siblings have been treating you."

"They really need to get over it," said George, startling Harry, who hadn't noticed his sitting down on his left next to him. Fred then sat on the other side of his twin. Breakfast went normally. Before they knew it, breakfast was over and Harry had Quidditch practice while Hermione was going (surprise, surprise) to the library. Fred and George had already left. When they got up from the table, Hermione gave Harry a quick kiss, and then said, "Bye Harry, I lov – WHAT?" and stared at her boyfriend from head to toe.

Harry began hearing sniggers around him, and with much trepidation, he looked down at himself. "I'LL KILL THEM!" he shouted. "Fred,

George, along with Ron and Ginny! I know they put them up to it!" Harry was now wearing nothing but a large diaper. He had a case of arrows with hearts instead of feathers in the back over his shoulder, and a bow in his hands. There were white wings sprouted out of his back and a golden halo hovering over his head. The moment he saw himself, everyone left in the great hall besides himself and Hermione started laughing. This included Ron and Ginny, who were on the other side of the table.

It also included Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle at the Slytherin table. They walked up to the table, and Malfoy said loudly, "Hark, the Harry angels sing," causing more laughter all around them. "I know you haven't got a new broom yet scarhead, but you can't use those wings in Quidditch!"

"Shut it, Malfoy!" Harry snarled, wishing he hadn't stored his wand in his now missing pants.

"Maybe it's an allergic reaction to kissing your filthy mudblood," sneered Draco, causing Crabbe, Goyle, and the remaining Slytherins to laugh while the rest of the school went quiet. Before Draco knew what was happening, he felt a sharp pain around his right eye, and he was falling to the floor with a ridiculous-looking Harry on top of him, beating him to a pulp while he muttered threats involving his father.

Hermione pointed her wand at Crabbe and Goyle while she yelled, "Harry, stop it! You'll get detention!"

"Actually," sneered a familiar voice, causing Harry to freeze, "You'll get five detentions, starting now, and you'll lose fifty points from Gryffindor." While Harry was paying attention to Snape hand out his punishment, Malfoy sucker-punched him in the face, giving him a black eye to match his own.

"What about Malfoy? Sir," said Hermione furious at this incredibly biased teacher.

"Mr. Malfoy was defending himself against this fallen angel," said Snape with a smirk on his face.

"But sir," said Hermione calmly, "he started it by calling me a mudblood."

"Ten points from Gryffindor for the use of that word, Miss Granger," sneered Snape, "and I suggest you go off to the library or wherever you were headed before you end up in detention with your new angelic boyfriend."

Harry said, "Go on Hermione, I'll be..." at that moment there was a loud pop around him, and he was back to normal. "Er, fine."

"Come this way, Potter," sneered Snape. "I've got several jars full of rats' eyes that need to be cleaned. No Quidditch practice for you today."

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Several hours later, after polishing a few thousand rat eyeballs, Harry showed up in the Gryffindor common room looking ill. Hermione, who'd been waiting for him, put her book down and ran up to him, throwing her arms around him. "Are, Are you alright Harry? You look a little, er..."

"...ill?" asked Harry. "I just polished a bunch of rat eyes, so I won't be eating anything for the rest of the day! I hope I don't have nightmares about it. If you know how to obliviate my memory, I'd appreciate it if you would."

"I, I can't do that," said Hermione shyly, "but I can try to take your mind off of, er, things," as she leaned closer to kiss him.

"Hold on, Hermione. I don't know if I'll change again."

"Upon threat of death, the twins swore to me that what they put in your food only makes you change once," said Hermione, looking deadly serious.

"I guess we can try. I know I wouldn't lie to you when you have that look in your eyes! Besides, if I'm gonna change again, I'd rather do it here than in front of Malfoy again."

“That’s the truth,” said Hermione softly, as she pulled his face down to hers.

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“Can’t you two ever stop kissing?” shouted Ginny at them several minutes later. After what you did to Ron, we thought the lesson this morning was enough, but obviously n...”

“What do you mean,” asked Hermione panting while panting for air, “what we did to Ron?”

“He told me about how he caught you kissing last Sunday and you hexed him!” hissed Ginny with her hands on her hips. “I couldn’t believe! How could you do that to him?”

“Is that what that prat told you?” asked Harry angrily while his face was turning pink with fury.

“Of course that’s what he told me!” said Ginny, looking around the common room to find her brother, finding him sitting in front of the fireplace looking timid. “Come here, Ron.”

“Yes, Ronald,” said Hermione, her face also pink, “I think it’s time Ginny heard what really happened!”

Ron looked pale as he slowly approached. “It, it happened like, like I said, more or less.”

“Less, Ron! How can you lie like that about us? I thought you were our friend!” said Harry.

“The truth Ginny,” said Hermione, turning to Ron’s now confused sister, “Is that when Ron caught us kissing, he said that I was ugly and Harry was using me! He said no boy would ever want me, and I lost my temper and petrified him for a few minutes while Harry calmed me down. When we released him, we told him that we were going out now, so he’d have to accept it if he wanted to hang out with us. He then stormed off without saying a word.”

Ginny looked at her brother, who was now more pale than ever. "Is that what really happened, dear brother?" Ginny could see the answer by the way Ron started backing up toward the boys' staircase. Before he got very far, she'd performed the bat bogey hex on him and he was running up the stairs, trying to escape his own flying boogers. Ginny then turned back to Harry and Hermione. "I'm sorry guys. I'll make sure to tell Fred and George the truth. I shouldn't have believed him. It didn't sound like something you would do, but..."

"But he's your brother," offered Hermione. "It's all right now, you know the truth. Are we friends again?"

"Friends," said the embarrassed redhead.

"Friends," said Harry.

"Now," said Ginny with an evil look in her eyes, "we've got to get revenge on my brother for what happened today!"

Harry smiled at that thought, but said, "Didn't you just get revenge?"

"No, no!" she said with a smirk. "That was for lying to me. It had nothing to do with the prank on you."

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## Chapter 3 – Rising Above

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 12 – The Patronus

It had been a week and a half since their discussion with Ginny. Ron had appeared nervous any time he was near Harry, Hermione, Ginny, Fred, or George. He knew they were going to get back at him, but didn't know how. The five of them had quickly come up with a plan, but it needed the right circumstances. Finally, on a Wednesday morning just after breakfast, they had their chance.

Ron, who had been sitting in the Great Hall with Seamus and Dean, got up to leave when Draco Malfoy walked up to him. His wand was in his hand, which was hanging by his side. "Hey Weasel! I've noticed that since Scarhead and the mudblood started snogging, they got rid of you! I can't blame them, either. I certainly wouldn't want someone wearing fifty-year-old robes carrying fifth-hand books like you hanging around me! Now if only Potter wises up and ditches Granger once he's gotten what he wants from her, they'll be hope for him."

Ron's face turned red as his features hardened. He glared at the Jr. Death Eater and shouted, "Shove off Mal...Whaaaaat!" At that moment, Draco's wand hand came forward as if pushed, all Ron's clothes except for his boxer shorts disappeared, and he levitated toward the ceiling as a huge spider fell, apparently from the ceiling, and landed on his head as a wet spot appeared at the front of his underwear. Silently, Harry, Hermione, Ginny, Fred, and George stowed their wands away as the entire hall, including Draco Malfoy, whose wand was pointed at Ron. Ron was screaming unintelligibly while holding one hand in front of the wet spot on his shorts, with the other one trying unsuccessfully to get the spider off of him. His complexion was pink all over his body, which was beginning to tremble in fear of heights, spiders, and humiliation.

Professor McGonagall, who'd watched the exchange between Ron and Draco, immediately walked up to Malfoy. She was not happy. "I saw that, Mr. Malfoy! Sixty points will be taken from Slytherin, and you will spend the next fourteen evenings in detention, cleaning the castle with Mr. Filch."

Draco paled. "What? You think I did that? I wouldn't have..."

"I'll have none of your lies, Mr. Malfoy," said McGonagall, her lips as thin as they'd ever been. "Unless you want to make it seventy points."

Draco looked fit to kill, but lowered his eyes and walked out of the hall. Professor McGonagall pointed her wand at Ron, who floated downward. The professor pointed her wand at him again, and a Gryffindor robe appeared on him. "I suggest you go back to Gryffindor Tower to change before your first class, Mr. Weasley." He didn't need to be told twice. He ran out of the hall, causing another round of laughter all around. Professor McGonagall then walked toward the head table as a small smile appeared on her face.

"That was brilliant, the way you stripped his clothes off, Hermione!" whispered Harry.

"What about how you forced Malfoy to point his wand at Ron?" she whispered back. "Or how Fred levitated him up toward the ceiling."

"What about that spider George conjured above him," whispered Harry, doing his best not to laugh.

"My favorite, though," whispered Hermione, whose face was red from holding back her laughter, "was when Ginny made that wet spot appear on his shorts."

Both Harry and his girlfriend hid their faces in their hands while they faced the floor as they silently laughed for about five minutes. Occasionally a snort or two could be heard from them. When they finally stopped, both of them had tears running from their eyes, so they wiped them away, picked up their books, and headed for their first class.

After dinner that day, Ron stormed into the common room looking both humiliated and angry. It didn't matter where in the castle he went, everyone was teasing him, even the first years. If Ron thought he would find peace in the common room, he was sadly mistaken. As soon as he walked in, everyone began chuckling. Lavender Brown

walked up to him, looked him over from head to toe, batted her eyes suggestively, and said “It’s not that you look bad Ron, but I prefer men who don’t pee their pants,” causing Ron to turned dark purple while the room rang with loud laughter.

Ron saw Fred, George, and Ginny sitting in a corner laughing along with the rest of them. He walked up to them furious. “I can’t believe it! Even my own flesh and blood laughing at my humiliation!

“You’ve got to admit it, Ron,” said Fred.

“It was pretty funny!” finished George.

“Well, at least Draco got what was coming to him!” said Ron. “I’m surprised he was able to pull it off.”

“Yeah Ron,” said Ginny, winking, “Draco did it.”

“Absolutely,” said Fred sarcastically.

“It was him. He did it,” said George in the same tone of voice.

“What do you mean? If he didn’t do it, then who...YOU!” he shouted, forgetting he was in a public place. Ron was furious. “YOU DID THAT TO ME!” causing all of the common room to explode with laughter, as Harry and Hermione walked inside, hand in hand. “WHY?”

“You lied to us to get us to humiliate Harry, and it ended up with Malfoy getting him in detention as well,” said Ginny.

“So the five of us,” said George, indicating Harry and Hermione, who were approaching them with smiles on their faces.

“Decided to give you a taste of your own medicine,” said Fred.

“You took away my robes,” said Harry, “so we took away your robes.”

“You gave Harry wings,” said Hermione, “so we made you float.”

“You gave me a diaper,” said Harry, “so we made you wet your pants.”

“I suggested adding the spider,” bragged Ginny.

“And we suggested framing Draco for it while McGonagall was nearby,” said the twins together.

Ron was now fuming! He was appalled. “I’m gonna, I’m gonna...”

“You’ll what?” said Ginny. “If you turn us in, you’ll lose Gryffindor points, give Slytherin points, and get Draco out of detention.”

“And if you try to prank us,” said Hermione, “we’ll do worse to you than we did today.”

“I, I can’t believe this guys! You were my friends.”

“That’s right Ron,” said Harry firmly. “We were your friends! When we started dating we thought you’d be happy for us, or even nervous about being left out, which we wouldn’t do to you!”

“Instead Ron,” shouted Hermione with tears in her eyes. “You insulted us and got almost your whole family against us by lying to them, and then you got them to humiliate Harry!”

“That was a very Slytherin thing to do to them, Ron,” said Ginny. “I’m sure Draco would be proud of you!”

Ron paled at the mention of Slytherin. He knew he was mean to them, but he hadn’t thought about that. He hung down his head. “I, I’m sorry guys. I, er, guess I panicked when I saw you together. I didn’t think you’d want me around anymore.”

“Not the way you were acting, mate,” said Harry. “But you’re the first friend I ever had. Who am I gonna talk quidditch with?” Harry then chuckled. “Who will I steal flying cars and visit giant spiders with?”

“If you want to visit Aragog’s family again, you can go with Hermione,” said Ron firmly, now chuckling too.

“So,” said Hermione, looking intently at Ron. “Are we friends again?”

“Ron nodded and said, “Yes, we’re friends again.”

“Good,” said Harry, Ginny, Fred, and George simultaneously.

“Maybe with my cloak and map, we can spy on Draco’s detention with Filch.”

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## Chapter 4 – Decisions

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 12 – The Patronus

The weeks passed quickly as Harry and Hermione (who'd insisted she join despite her already hectic schedule) took patronus lessons with Professor Lupin. When he'd directed them to think of a happy memory, they looked at each other and blushed. They both produced a partial patronus on their first try. Lupin smiled at them and said, "I don't think I want to know what memory you two were thinking of," causing them both to blush. They were both improving a great deal and the professor claimed that they'd both have a fully corporeal patronus within a few weeks. After Oliver Wood told them about the way he'd asked McGonagall about Harry's firebolt, Hermione rebuked him for thinking that winning a game of quidditch was more important than Harry's life. Oliver gave Harry an odd look and muttered something like, "women" as he walked away.

Although they were getting along with Ron, both of them noticed that he'd roll his eyes or sigh loudly whenever they'd show any affection. This was getting to be particularly annoying because Harry and Hermione were in the habit of holding hands whenever they were walking to the same place, and weren't about to stop to accommodate Ron.

In the meantime, Ron's grades were steadily declining. At first it was because he was avoiding Harry and Hermione, but then after he'd apologized, he started studying with them again. The trouble was that he'd spend the whole study time glaring at his study partners if they were even polite to one another. After three days of this, Harry politely suggested that Ron study separately from them. At that point, Harry's grades began improving. Without Ron distracting their studying by constantly bickering with Hermione, they got a lot more accomplished faster, and Harry retained a lot more knowledge afterward. Not to mention that once Ron was gone, Hermione started bribing him with kisses for doing homework and memorizing definitions, etc. Although Ron hadn't said a word against them, both could tell that Ron was really starting to resent them. Harry would

never forget the look of loathing on Ron's face when Harry got the same grade as Hermione in a transfiguration quiz, earning a public compliment from Professor McGonagall. He feared that his first friendship was near an end.

During their fourth week of lessons, both Harry and Hermione were able to produce a corporeal patronus, a stag and an otter respectively, to the utter astonishment of Professor Lupin. "I always knew you were both very bright and powerful for your age, but this is an amazing accomplishment. Harry, your father couldn't produce a patronus until his fourth year, and I've never seen anyone else, not even your mother, produce one earlier than their fifth year! You should both be very proud of your accomplishment! Harry, I feel sorry for any dementors that try to interrupt one of your games." He then offered them a butterbeer, which Harry pretended not to be familiar with after a quick look from Hermione.

The only thing that dampened their spirits was when Harry asked Lupin what was under a dementor's hood. This led to a discussion of the dementor's kiss, which both Harry and Hermione found to be very disturbing. After arranging for one more patronus lesson to practice, they left Professor Lupin and were headed toward Gryffindor tower. In an effort to change the subject, Hermione cautiously asked what Harry planned to ride during the upcoming quidditch match against Ravenclaw.

Harry said, "Er, I hadn't really thought about that. I don't want to get a new broom unless I have to, so I've been waiting for McGonagall to tell me one way or the other." Hermione smiled, obviously pleased that he didn't seem to be holding any bitterness toward her. "I suppose I could try to borrow a broom from someone in Hufflepuff." Harry's face brightened up at this point. "Come to think of it, their captain and seeker, Cedric Diggory, felt bad about catching the snitch when the dementors attacked. I'll bet I could persuade him to loan me his broom for the match. I think once we get back to the tower, I'll pull out my map to find him!"

They were at that moment interrupted by Professor McGonagall, who was carrying the firebolt, and told them that the teachers couldn't find anything wrong with it. Harry told her, "I understand why you

confiscated it, Professor. I want you to know I'm not upset that you had to test it for jinxes. I'm just as relieved as anyone else that it's safe."

Professor McGonagall smiled down at Harry. "I'm glad to see that you're growing up, Mr. Potter. Your class performance has also reflected this. I'm sure this is due in part to Miss Granger's influence." Hermione went slightly pink at this statement.

Harry put an arm around Hermione and smiled back at his head of house. "Yes, she's been a bigger help to me than even she knows." Harry's girlfriend's cheeks now went fully red at his compliment.

"Now do try and win the match, Potter. Good day Harry, Hermione." With that, Professor McGonagall turned around and walked off, and Harry could swear he heard a soft sniffle coming from her direction.

They both walked through the portrait hole with smiles on their faces, Harry holding his new firebolt with pride. "I told you Hermione was nutters!" shouted Ron from across the room with contempt, effectively wiping the smiles off of Harry and Hermione's faces. "I don't know why you ever listened to that know-it-all!"

"That's enough, Ron," said Harry, doing his best to control his temper while everyone in the room stared between the two of them.

"Fine," said Ron, "just so you know that I was right and Hermione was wrong!" Ron stormed up the stairs to his dorm, and the room's atmosphere literally changed with him gone. People then started to line up to hold his new broom, sure that Ravenclaw wouldn't stand a chance in their next match. This excitement was soon ended as Ron stormed back down the stairs enraged. He was dragging a bedsheet with him, marching straight toward Harry and Hermione, shouting to anyone who would listen, "LOOK! THERE'S BLOOD ON MY SHEETS! SCABBERS IS MISSING! THERE ARE GINGER CAT HAIRS ON THE FLOOR! CROOKSHANKS ATE SCABBERS!"

"He did not, Ron!" shouted Hermione back at the red-haired, red-faced boy.

“Oh yes, Miss I-know-everything, of course you’re always right!” yelled Ron.

“Shut it, Ron!” yelled Harry, now beginning to lose his temper.

“Oh yes, the great hero, the bloody Boy-Who-Lived, has spoken,” said Ron, causing Harry’s face to turn pink while everyone nearby started backing away except for the Weasley twins, who were slowly approaching.

“Ron, the first time you showed me Scabbers, you said he was pathetic! You’re always complaining about how useless he is! The woman at the pet store said he should have been dead ages ago! He’s been sick, lately, and maybe this is for the best, ugh!” At that moment, Ron punched Harry in the jaw, causing his to back up into Hermione, who looked very frightened. He clenched his fists and started to walk towards his Ron with a look that should have sent Ron running away. He moved his left hand, distracting Ron while he punched him full in the face with his right, causing Ron to fall on the floor a few feet backwards. At that moment, Fred and George stepped in between them, George taking Harry and Fred taking Ron. Fred pretty much forced Ron, who was screaming threats, up the stairs while George was making sure Harry didn’t chase after him.

After a few minutes Harry said, “It’s ok George. I’m calmed down now. I can’t believe he hit me.”

“I can’t either. If mum finds out, she’ll have a fit. That threat should get him to leave you and Hermione alone.” George smiled. “I’m sure that’s what Fred’s telling him now. I think I’ll go upstairs and make sure.” George then left Harry alone with Hermione.

“I’m so sorry that you got into a fight with Ron over my cat, Harry,” said Hermione, whom Harry just noticed was crying. “Are you all right?”

“Of course I’m all right. Do you really think Ron could hurt me?” Harry smiled. “Even Dudley can hit harder than Ron.” He chuckled. “The only reason he hit me at all was because I wasn’t expecting it. I had to learn how to avoid getting hit, and how to take getting hit when I can’t avoid it, in order to survive at the Dursleys.”

“I’m sorry for that, too.” Hermione sighed. “Can’t Professor Dumbledore do anything about the Dursleys?”

“He claims not. He says I’m safer there, but I think that’s a load of crap!” He sighed. “How could I possibly be safe living with people who wish I was dead? I would rather die living with someone who cares about me than live with them!”

“How can you say that, Harry?” asked Hermione, looking nervous.

“You haven’t lived with them. You don’t know what I put up with before I finally lost my temper and blew up Aunt Marge. I spend my whole summer as their slave, and no matter what I do, it’s not good enough! I can’t tell you how many times I’ve cooked breakfast for them and had to watch them eat while I had to go without because Uncle Vernon said I looked at him wrong.”

“Oh Harry,” said Hermione, putting her hand on his shoulder, “I had no idea it was that bad.”

“I don’t usually like to talk about it. But you can’t imagine how good it felt to spend that time in Diagon Alley free from the Dursleys! I don’t care what Fudge or Dumbledore say; I’m not going back there when this year’s over. I’ve made up my mind. If I have to run away again, I will.”

“You can’t, Harry.”

“Yes I can. You’ve never seen my vault at Gringott’s. I have a lot of money from my parents. I know I can afford to live somewhere else. I’m going to send a letter to Gringotts to find out exactly how much money I have.”

“I can’t say I blame you, but could you at least let me talk to Professor Dumbledore about it for you? Maybe he can arrange for you to stay somewhere else. It would be better than just running away.”

He sighed. “Ok Hermione, you can talk to Dumbledore about the Dursleys, but don’t tell him I’m thinking about running away. He might personally deliver me there if he’s worried about that. Just tell him what I’ve told you about the way the Dursleys treat me, and that

you're concerned. If that doesn't persuade him, then we'll both know he doesn't care anything about me."

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## Chapter 5 – Harry’s Home

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 12 – The Patronus

“Mars Bars,” said a young woman with bushy brown hair as she stood at the entrance to the headmaster’s office. She had asked Professor McGonagall for the password so that she could meet with Professor Dumbledore on Harry’s behalf. It had been about a week since her conversation with Harry about the Dursleys. It had been just two days since Gryffindor’s quidditch victory over Ravenclaw and Black’s subsequent attack on Ron. She of course was glad Ron wasn’t killed. She might have wanted him hurt a little, but not killed. She had to admit she was relieved that Sirius hadn’t found Harry’s bed. Ron had walked around in a daze yesterday, occasionally glancing at Harry and her. This time, it didn’t seem to be with anger. It seemed more like regret. This morning at breakfast, Ron had come up to them and asked if he could speak with them tonight. They’d agreed to meet him in the common room at eight. It was now seven o’clock, and Hermione was walking up the stairs for her first private meeting with Dumbledore.

“Come in, come in Miss Granger. Have a seat,” said Dumbledore, with a twinkle in his eye as he indicated the chair in front of his desk.

She nervously stepped forward, walking toward her chair. “Good evening, Professor. Thank you for meeting with me.”

“It’s always a pleasure speaking to our top student,” he said amiably. “How are things going with your rather unconventional schedule?”

She sat down and smiled, feeling at ease. “It’s keeping me busy, but all my classes are going fine. Although I must admit I find divination to be less than...er...satisfying.”

Dumbledore chuckled at that. “Yes; many of our students, not to mention Professor McGonagall, find divination to be a, shall we say, wooly discipline. At one time even I considered dropping it from our curriculum.”

“I may consider that, sir,” she said, nodding.

“I understand that the student whose death Professor Trelawney is predicting this year is none other than your boyfriend, Mr. Potter, the topic I believe you wished to discuss with me today.”

“Yes sir,” she said, blushing when he mentioned that Harry was her boyfriend. “I, er, would like to talk about his home life.”

“You mean the Dursleys, don’t you Miss Granger,” said Dumbledore, now slightly tense.

“Yes sir. I’m very concerned about how they treat him. He’s told me that he’s basically their slave. Many times he’s cooked for them and not been able to eat because his uncle says he looked at him wrong. They constantly call him a freak, encouraging their son to taunt him! He’s never happy or loved while he’s there. They hate everything about him! They’ve never given him any clothes except for hand-me-downs from his whale of a cousin, even though they have plenty of money, and they don’t even celebrate his birthday. How can he be expected to live with them? In the muggle world, they could be arrested on charges of neglect and abuse. Why does he have to live with them? Why can’t he live elsewhere? Anywhere else?” By this time she was crying, and did nothing to hide it. She hoped her tears might help persuade him.

Dumbledore’s countenance changed to sad. He appeared very old and worn out to Hermione. “I understand how you feel Miss Granger. I know how he is treated there, and if I could, I would move him elsewhere. Unfortunately, that is the only place where his mother’s blood lives.”

“His mother’s blood?” questioned Hermione.

He nodded, “Yes, Miss Granger. When I brought him there, I put a type of extremely powerful protection on that house, based off of his mother’s blood. This is to protect him from any of Voldemort’s supporters, such as Sirius Black, who may wish to do him harm. No one can harm him while he lives at his Aunt Petunia’s house.”

Although she did comprehend what the headmaster was saying, she did have one problem with his argument. "Not physically maybe, but mentally and emotionally. They have never given him love or support, and it has caused him to have low self esteem and..."

"I am very sorry, Miss Granger," interrupted Dumbledore in a very uncharacteristic manner. "Forgive my rudeness, but my decision on this matter is final. Good evening."

As Hermione walked slowly out of the office with her head hung down, she felt like all hope had left her. She had just known that the headmaster would see reason. Now she knew that Harry would run away, and she couldn't blame him. She would never have become the successful student she was without her parents' support. She couldn't imagine dreading the summer because you knew you'd be a slave, just like that house elf, Dobby that Harry met the year before. Harry had managed to free that slave, but Hermione had failed to free Harry. She decided then and there, as she was walking toward Gryffindor tower, to support Harry in whatever decision he made and help him any way she could.

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"Hello Hermione," called Harry from the chair near the fire a few seconds after she entered the common room. She turned and walked toward him. "Judging by the expression on your face, I'd say that your meeting with Dumbledore didn't go so well."

"Not really," she sighed, "Though one good thing came out of it. He suggested I drop divination, and I believe I will talk to Professor McGonagall about it first thing in the morning. But as for your situation, he says his decision is final, that the blood protection spell he put over the house will keep you physically safe, and that's all he seems to care about." She started crying a little bit, and Harry took her in his arms and hugged her. After about a minute, they separated and sat down on two chairs facing each other.

"It's all right. I don't have to obey Dumbledore when I'm not here. I got my response from Gringotts while you were gone, so I know I can afford to live on my own!"

Hermione was slightly startled by this news. “You did? That’s great news! How much money did your parents leave you?”

“About a hundred million galleons,” said Harry with a smile.

She paled. “A hundred million?”

“Yeah! According to my letter, I’ll never have to work for a living if I don’t want to. I can live off the interest alone. But that’s not all. I own several homes across the world, including a manor twenty miles from London.”

“What?”

“Yeah! I’m gonna move there when we get out this summer.”

“I, I figured that.” Hermione took a deep breath. “I’ll help you in any way I can.”

He put his hands on hers. “I knew I could count on you. I love you.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide at this pronouncement. “You, you just said you love me.”

He blushed and put his head down. “I, er, I did say that. I, I hope it’s y’know, ok. I’ve never said that before in my life. I, I don’t expect you to...”

“No,” she said, thrilled that he loved her and scared he’d misunderstand her. “It’s more than fine, Harry.” She put a hand under his chin and lifted his face so that their eyes met. “I love you too. I’m just surprised and honored you’d say that to me.”

“It’s true. I do love you. Hold on, you, you love me to.”

“Yes Harry, I love you too.” She then pulled his chin close to hers and kissed him.

“Hem Hem,” came Ron’s voice, interrupting their kiss.

“Oh,” said Harry as they broke apart. “It’s you.”

“Er, yes, it’s me Harry,” said Ron as he sat in a nearby chair.

“Hello Ron,” said Hermione coldly.

“Hello Hermione.”

“What do you want?” asked Harry.

“Er,” said Ron, his ears red. “I just, well I wanted to apologize.”

“You treated us like dirt, glared at us for being together, and then punched Harry for no reason!” said Hermione fiercely, causing Ron to flinch.

“Yeah, I know. I’ve, well since Sirius came the other night I’ve been, y’know, thinking about what’s important. I’ve, well been acting like a jerk, and I’m sorry.” Ron took a deep breath. “I know I’ve messed up big time, and we’ll probably never be as, y’know, close again. I just don’t want you to hate me anymore.”

“Ron,” said Hermione, “you’ve really hurt us with how you’ve acted. You’ve apologized before but didn’t change how you’ve acted.”

“How do we know that you really mean it this time?” said Harry.

Ron looked down at the floor dejectedly. “You’re right guys. There’s no reason for you to believe me. I’m sorry.”

“We’ll think about it. For now, you can stop glaring at us every chance you get,” said Hermione.

“I, I will,” said Ron. “Thanks. Thanks for talking to me.” He got up and walked away.”

Harry turned to Hermione. “What do you think?”

She sighed and said, “I honestly don’t know. We’ll just have to see. Anyway Harry,” she said, changing the subject, “What do you know about that mansion of yours?”

## Chapter 6 – Secrets

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 14 – Snape's Grudge

It was now four days after Hermione's talk with the Headmaster, and she was in Hogsmeade. After some persuasion, Hermione had agreed that Harry should sneak to the village under his invisibility cloak so that they could have their first real date. He took his cloak out of his trunk and covered himself with it. He then quietly snuck past Neville, who was sitting in the common room. When he opened the door, Neville looked in that direction and called out, "Who's there?" eventually walking to the door, looking outside, and shutting it.

When Harry arrived near the one-eyed-witch passage, he noticed Snape standing near it so he waited as quietly as possible for about ten minutes until the greasy git left. After that, he had no problem getting into the passage and then on to Honeydukes. Upon coming upstairs (still under the cloak), he found Hermione browsing the sweets looking rather bored. He figured she had been waiting for a while. He snuck up behind her and tapped her shoulder. She turned around and didn't see anyone. She then put her hands forward to feel him. When she felt his chest, she whispered, "Harry, what took you so long?"

He whispered back, "Snape was standing guard at the passage, so I had to wait for him to leave."

"Do you want to buy anything in here?"

"Yes, let's go to a quiet corner so I can get my money out."

After he'd given her his wallet, figuring it was easier than constantly handing her money, he instructed her to get what he wanted, along with something extra for herself for looking so pretty. She blushed at this but did as she instructed, purchasing a box of sugar quills for herself. They then visited several shops, with Harry whispering instructions to her. After about two hours of this, he had her give him his wallet. He then instructed her to go to the Three Broomsticks in a half hour, order two butterbeers, and get a secluded table. As he was

walking away, he heard her whisper, "Does this have something to do with Valentine's Day?"

When Harry, now holding a small bag that contained a wrapped item, entered the pub under his cloak, he quickly scanned the room, quickly spotting his girlfriend, who was sitting in a corner table looking around the room impatiently. He quickly made his way to the seat next to her and whispered, "Sorry I'm late, the shop keeper took a longer time to wrap your gift than I expected." The anger dissolved from her face, being replaced by a smile. She whispered, "May I join you under the cloak?"

When they were through at the Three Broomsticks, they made their way to the Shrieking Shack, both of them under the cloak. When they saw Malfoy and his goons, Harry led them to a nearby spot that was hidden and whispered, "Stay here, Hermione," as he pulled the cloak away from her so that it was just covering him.

"But, you'll get caught," she said, wasting her breath as he was too far away to hear her.

He splattered all three of them with mud that seemed to come from nowhere. Malfoy screamed, "Who's there?" just before his pants fell down, causing him to bend over quickly to pull them back up. Crabbe then fell onto Goyle, and they both rolled into Malfoy, who fell with them. Unfortunately, when Malfoy fell, Harry's cloak got caught just enough to reveal Harry's face. Malfoy looked terrified as he exclaimed, "Potter?" just as mud from a completely different direction hit him square in the back of the head, causing the three Slytherins to run away. Once they were gone, Hermione, whose hands were suspiciously full of mud, came out of her hiding space with a worried look on her face. "Harry, you've got to hurry back to the castle before Malfoy finds a teacher!"

Harry pulled his cloak back over his head and ran as fast as he could back to the castle. He left his cloak in the passage and came out, only to be caught by Snape moments later. After being told led to the dungeon and told Malfoy's story, Harry was told to empty his pockets. This revealed a 'spare piece of parchment' that proceeded to insult Snape when he tried to read it. Snape then called Lupin, who took the

map and lectured Harry on how irresponsible he had been, causing Harry to feel worse than Snape ever could make him feel. After he'd spoken to Hermione about it, she agreed with Lupin that he had been foolish. He maintained that he needed to go to Hogsmeade, but his prank on Malfoy was a foolish, unnecessary risk, and it had cost him the Marauders' Map. She didn't entirely agree with his reasoning, but decided to retrieve his cloak anyway.

A few days later, it was Valentine's Day. Harry woke up, got ready, and went to the common room as fast as he could. He got down the stairs just in time to see Hermione sit in one of the chairs. He quickly joined her, wishing her a "Happy Valentine's Day" before kissing her. He then told her, "I love you."

She blushed lightly. "I love you too, Harry. Happy Valentine's Day!"

"Would you do me the honor of joining me after dinner for a walk to a place where we can exchange gifts in private?"

She looked at him skeptically, but said, "All right, Harry. But for now, I think it's time for breakfast."

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The day went by smoothly, unlike the previous year when a dwarf had jumped him to make him listen to a singing Valentine, which Malfoy accused Ginny Weasley of sending. Somehow he thought she'd had more on her mind than singing valentines with Tom Riddle's diary and all but he didn't know, and honestly didn't care if she did or didn't. Hermione and he spent most of the day in class together, except when he was in Divination, which she had dropped upon Dumbledore's suggestion. He wondered how she still had class at that time even though she'd dropped the subject she had been taking, but whenever he brought it up, she changed the subject immediately. He decided that if she wanted him to know, she'd have told him, so he backed off.

After supper, they went back to the tower to grab his cloak and their gifts. They then snuck to a room Hermione had never been to before. It had a comfortable couch in it, at that was just about it. "What is this room?" she asked as he closed the door behind them.

“It’s the room that used to hold the Mirror of Erised. It’s also where I had my first conversation with Dumbledore.”

“Really?” asked Hermione. “I’d have thought he’d want to speak with you as soon as you got to Hogwarts, possibly before.” She sighed. “Did he ask you how the Dursley’s treated you?”

“No. He told me the mirror showed me with a family because that’s what I wanted most. Then he told me not to dwell on dreams.”

“That was pretty rude of him!” said Hermione indignantly. “He didn’t even want you to dream about having a family that loves you!”

Harry sighed. “Hermione, let’s not talk about that now. We’re here to celebrate our love, not our problems.”

She looked down. “I’m sorry Harry. You’re right. Why don’t we exchange gifts?”

“Great idea!” said Harry, pulling the small wrapped box out of his pocket. He handed it to her as she handed him a thin rectangular package.

“You first,” Hermione insisted.

Harry complied, tearing off the wrapping paper to find an eight by ten muggle photo of Hermione, wearing a light blue dress. The frame was wooden, stained a light shade of brown. On the bottom of the frame was a small gold rectangle with the inscription, “Harry, I love you, now and always. Love, Hermione.” Harry hugged her, burying his face in her hair. When they separated, she saw him trying to hide the fact that he was wiping tears from his eyes.

“Did I ever tell you that you’re the only person to ever say you love me?” asked Harry.

“Not precisely, but when you said you’d never told anyone you loved them, I assumed as much.”

“I just want you to know how much you mean to me, Hermione. That wrapped box in your hands doesn’t begin to express how I feel...”

"I know, love. I feel the same way. These are just tokens of our love, and I'm sure I'll love whatever you got me," she said as she tore off the paper, revealing a clear plastic case that contained a gold necklace with a locket in the shape of a heart with the words 'I love you' engraved at the front. She opened it to see one side had a wizard photo of himself with a wizard photo of herself on the other side. The pictures were blowing kisses at each other, which caused her to chuckle while her eyes filled with tears. "Thank you, Harry. It's beautiful! Can you put it on me? I'll never take it off."

"All right," he said, as he took the necklace from her. While he was fastening it behind her neck, he noticed another chain. Before she could protest, he'd pulled that extremely long chain out from under her robes. He saw a tiny, sparkling hourglass hanging from it. He went to touch it and she slapped his hand. She then started stuffing it back under her robes as quickly as possible.

"Ouch! That hurt," said Harry, rubbing the hand she had slapped.

"I'm sorry," she said sincerely. "I just can't let you touch that."

"It's alright Hermione, but why? What is it?"

She looked desperate. "Please don't ask me. I promised I wouldn't tell anyone."

He could see that she was pleading with him. "I won't force you to tell what it is, but, er, it's not dangerous, is it."

"Er, it can be, but it's not. It's not harming me. Please, don't ask me anything else."

"All right. On one condition," said Harry with an evil look in his face.

"What's that?" said Hermione, her voice sounding a bit shaky.

"You give me a kiss."

## Chapter 7 – Easter Break

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 15 – The Quidditch Final

The next month passed smoothly, with Harry and Hermione working as much ahead as possible so that they'd have time to explore Potter Manor. Hermione had arranged for them to spend Easter break with her parents, claiming that they wanted to get to know Harry better anyway. They also were taking the week off of work. They had met briefly in Diagon Alley while shopping for supplies for their second year at Hogwarts. They agreed to visit his mansion the morning after they arrived so that they'd know what shape the mansion is in, and if he needed to buy anything to make it livable before school got out for the summer. It was now dinner time on the day before the Hogwarts Express took the students home for the break. Hermione and Harry were eating in the Great Hall when a first year Gryffindor girl who was staring at Harry walked up to them and shyly said, "Er, Professor Dumbledore told me to give you this note."

She handed the paper to Harry, and their hands touched as Harry said, "Thank you very much," causing the girl to go completely red in the face and run to the other side of the table.

Hermione chuckled, "It looks like I've got some competition."

Harry, who was taking a drink of pumpkin juice, started coughing. "Competition? What do you mean?"

"Isn't it obvious?" said Hermione with a smile on her face. "She's got an even bigger crush on you than Ginny Weasley."

He chuckled remembering Ginny putting her elbow in the butter dish at her house. "At least she didn't send me a singing Valentine."

She giggled at that. "What's the note say?"

Harry unrolled the parchment and read it out loud.

"Dear Harry,

I request both yours and Miss Granger's presence in my office after dinner.

Yours sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore"

"I wonder what this is all about," said Hermione.

"I guess there's only one way to find out."

Fifteen minutes later, the two of them were facing the gargoyle outside of Dumbledore's office. At the mention of 'Mars Bars,' the statue moved, revealing the staircase. They quickly made their way up the stairs and knocked on the door.

"Come in, come in," said the voice of Professor Dumbledore.

They opened the door and the aged wizard indicated two chairs in front of his desk. They quickly sat down and faced him. Harry spoke first. "Sir, are we in some sort of trouble?"

Albus chuckled. "No, no. Of course not. This is about your Easter plans."

"My Easter plans?" asked Harry.

"I understand that you're planning on spending the break with Miss Granger at her house."

"Yes, sir," said Hermione. "Why?"

Dumbledore put on his most grandfatherly face, placing his palms on the table and facing them both. "I'm afraid I must recommend that Mr. Potter stays here for the break."

"What?" said both Harry and Hermione together.

"I'm afraid that with Sirius Black on the loose, the castle is the safest place to be."

"Like the Dursley's house?" asked Harry, failing in his attempt to disguise his anger.

Dumbledore looked in Harry's eyes. "Yes, I'm afraid so."

"But you can't sir!" said Hermione. "Isn't Harry ever allowed to enjoy himself?"

Dumbledore took a deep breath. "I'm sure that he can find a way to entertain himself here at Hogwarts. Perhaps he could find someone to play chess with."

Harry had heard enough. "Sir,"

"Yes."

"As headmaster, you have legal authority here. Do you actually have any legal authority to stop me from leaving for Easter like many other students do every year?"

Dumbledore's face went slightly pink, while Hermione stifled a giggle. Apparently this wasn't going the way he'd planned. "Not exactly, but I'd hope you would trust my judgment."

Harry couldn't stop the smile that formed on his face. He didn't want to upset Dumbledore too much, so he said, "Then I thank you for your concern, and appreciate your advice, but in this case I choose to spend the week with Hermione. It can't be more dangerous than the Chamber of Secrets."

Dumbledore sighed, "If you insist, I cannot stop you, but I believe you are making a mistake."

"Then sir, it's my mistake to make," said Harry in the most polite voice he could. "If there's nothing more, we have some packing to do. Are we dismissed?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

“The nerve of him,” shouted Hermione, once they were far enough away from Dumbledore’s office. “Trying to keep you prisoner in this castle!”

“Did you see how shocked he was when I didn’t simply hang my head down and say, ‘Yes sir.’”

“I loved it when you asked if he had the legal authority to hold you here?” said Hermione, smiling. “I thought I was going to burst out laughing when his face turned pink.”

They both laughed while walking together toward Gryffindor Tower until Harry pointed out, “Here’s even more proof that he doesn’t care about my happiness.”

The brunette girl frowned for a second, but then smiled again. “He may not care about your happiness, but I do!” and then surprised him with a quick kiss on the lips. After they both smiled at each other for a few seconds, they continued walking.

When they walked into the common room, they were immediately intercepted by Ron. “Hey guys, I’m glad you’re here!”

“What do you want, Ron,” asked Hermione as she rolled her eyes.

His ears turned slightly pink. “Hermione, er, I’ve been having a lot of trouble with my classes without your help, and er, I was hoping you two would, y’know, help me study over break. I’m staying here, too.”

“Actually Ron,” said Harry, “we’re not staying here for the break.”

“What? Don’t tell me the Dursleys are making you...”

“For your information, Ronald,” said Hermione, “Harry’s spending the break at my house.”

Ron went red. He started screaming. “YOUR HOUSE? Your house! Harry, I know what you’re...Hermione, I can’t believe you’d let him...”

“LET HIM WHAT?” shouted a thoroughly ticked off Hermione, who was walking up to him with a murderous look in her eyes.

If Ron had any brains at all, he'd have run away. Instead, he continued yelling at her. "You know what! I didn't think you'd...OOOWWWWW!" Ron collapsed onto the floor, with his hands on his crotch. Hermione had kicked him hard in the place where it hurts the most. He seriously doubted he'd ever be able to father any children after that kick.

Harry, who'd known better than to interfere with Hermione's argument with Ron, merely shook his head at Ron saying, "You should have known better," and then walked up the stairs to his dorm so he could pack.

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The next day was uneventful. Ron stayed as far away from them as he could at breakfast, and then Harry and Hermione got on board the train and headed to London. The ride was uneventful, meaning that the Dementors for some reason did not search the train. Hermione suggested that they're probably more interested in who's coming to Hogwarts than who's leaving. When they got to King's Cross station, they exited the train, hand in hand. Hermione looked around for a minute, and started dragging Harry toward her parents. Harry recognized the man with brown hair just starting to go grey. He was wearing navy blue pants with a matching sweater. Then Harry saw Hermione's mother standing next to her husband. She had brown, bushy hair, just like Hermione's. She was wearing a light blue dress with a navy blue jacket. "Harry!" they both said together.

Harry thought they sounded a little overly friendly, but was determined to make the best possible impression on his girlfriend's parents. "Hello Mr. and Mrs. Granger. It's good to see you again." He then shook both their hands. When he noticed Mrs. Granger staring at his baggy clothes, he said, "I would really appreciate it if you could take me to Diagon Alley some time this week, so I can get some money out of the bank, and then take me shopping for clothes that fit. I'm tired of wearing my cousin's hand-me-downs."

Hermione glared at her mother for staring at Harry's clothes. "I told you the way his so-called-family treats him! That's one of the reasons he has to get away from them. The funny thing is that if they'd treated

him like they should have, he'd probably be sharing his fortune with them."

"I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to stare. I just didn't notice the last time we met you, probably because you were wearing robes over them. I think it's still early enough to get your money and clothes today, if you don't mind staying out." When nobody objected, they walked into the Grangers' silver Mercedes and drove to a muggle restaurant within walking distance of the Leaky Cauldron. After they'd eaten a late lunch there, they all walked through the pub into Diagon Alley, and on into Gringotts. After Harry had taken out a significant amount both in wizard and muggle money, they went to Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor for ice cream cones, Harry's treat.

When they'd gotten their ice cream and were sitting at an outside table, Harry said, "Last summer, after I'd left the Dursleys and stayed here, I did a lot of homework at this spot, and Mr. Fortescue would give me sundaes every half hour, and he'd tell me about medieval witch burnings."

"Really?" asked Hermione. "That must have helped you a lot on that essay."

"It sure did."

"Hermione told us that the funniest thing about those witch burnings was that real witches and wizards not only didn't die, but actually enjoyed them," said Mrs. Granger.

"Yes," added Mr. Granger, "Hermione said that one particular witch would purposely get caught so that she'd be burned. Someone the Weird."

"Wendelin," said Harry, impressing Hermione by remembering something he'd studied on his own before they were dating.

After they'd eaten their ice cream, the group left Diagon Alley and headed to a muggle clothing store, where Hermione and her mother helped Harry pick out an entirely new wardrobe so he could burn every piece of clothing the Dursleys had ever given him. They asked him what colors he wanted and had him try on outfit after outfit. He

bought several pairs of jeans, along with a bunch of shirts, socks, underwear (which embarrassed Harry), t-shirts, and pajamas. He bought two pairs of casual shoes. Hermione even got him to purchase a few suits. One was navy blue, which her mother had picked out, while the other one was dark green, which she picked out because it matched his eyes. He then got some dress shirts, ties, socks, and shoes to go with them. He even got a few belts. When he left, he was wearing one of the outfits while he and all the Grangers carried the rest of his purchases to the car.

They then went to the Grangers' home, which Harry thought was very nice. It appeared to be two stories tall, and had light blue paneling on it. Hermione gave him a tour, starting with the outside garden.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Hermione.

"The flower garden? It's beautiful. Much better than Aunt Petunia's boring garden."

"Thank you," said Hermione. "When I was five, I asked mum if we could plant a garden out here. She agreed, and we worked on it for about a month, with me picking out the different types of flowers and where they go." She smiled. "I guess it's not as orderly as someone like Mrs. Dursley would approve of, but I like it."

"So do I," said Harry. "And I like you, too," he said, quickly kissing her.

After she showed him their swimming pool, which they kept covered up until she came home for the summer, she took him in the house, showing him the living room, dining room, and kitchen. She let him look into her parent's study, but not go in.

"Why?" asked Harry. "Do they have a dead body hidden in there?"

She chuckled. "Yes, the last person to trespass in there. My long lost brother, Bill. He was two at the time," she said in mock sorrow, "and had just learned to walk. He took one step into the room and that was it. My dad strangled him right there on the spot."

Harry chuckled. "I guess I should stay out of there, then."

“Yeah,” said Hermione. “Seriously though, they like to keep that area for themselves, so please stay out of there.”

“Sure, no problem,” said Harry.

“We’re now done with this floor,” said Hermione importantly. “Let’s go up to second floor. I’ll show you my room and the two guest rooms.

Hermione’s room was painted in a light tan hue, and the carpet was brown. One wall was nothing but several full bookshelves. She had a queen-size bed that had burgundy pillow cases and blanket, while the sheets were white. She had a semi-fancy wooden dresser, along with a huge desk that is made for corners. It had a computer on it, but still had plenty of room for writing on parchment, with a burgundy swivel office chair that allowed her to easily move around the desk. Both guest rooms had white walls, brown carpet, a small wooden desk with a chair, a small dresser, and a queen-size bed with white sheets and pillowcases, and a dark green blanket.

He was given the guest room nearest to Hermione’s bedroom. After he’d put his belongings in there, he came back to the living room where they all ordered pizza and watched a Disney movie together. During the movie, Hermione’s father asked, “Well, what do you think of the house?”

“It’s really nice,” said Harry. “A lot nicer than the Dursleys.”

“Did she tell you about our study?” asked Mrs. Granger.

“Yes,” said Harry, and then added, “She told me about how her long lost brother is buried there.”

Both of her parents chuckled. Mr. Granger said, “She’s still telling that old story? She first told that to a friend of hers from first grade.”

Hermione’s face turned pink, but she defiantly said, “It still works. Why should I make up a different story?”

Mrs. Granger said, “Seriously, we hope you understand. We consider that room to be part of our workplace, and don’t like anyone wandering around there, moving books, and what have you. It’s not

that we don't trust you; we just prefer to keep everyone out. It helps to keep the peace."

When the movie was over, they went to bed after being told to be ready for breakfast by eight o'clock.

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"Good morning Hermione," said Harry from the table as Hermione came into the dining room at 7:59 a.m. Harry had gotten up at 7, showered quickly, and gotten downstairs before she was even up.

"Morning Harry," said Hermione, covering her mouth as she yawned. "You're up early. You're never this alert for breakfast at Hogwarts."

"But all I have to look forward to at Hogwarts are classes. Today I get to see the house where I lived as a baby."

"Of course," said Hermione, feeling stupid. "I should have realized that this meant a lot more to you than just looking at a house. This is a piece of your history, a connection to your parents."

"I'm glad both of you are up," came Mrs. Granger's voice from behind them. They turned and saw her carrying two plates loaded with pancakes, sausage, and eggs for them.

"Mrs. Granger, you didn't have to do that. I'd have been happy to..."

"Nonsense Harry, you're our guest here. And it's Marissa. You can call my husband 'Adam,' also. You're not at the Dursleys' anymore."

"Thank you Mrs., I mean, Marissa," said Harry.

"You're welcome, Harry."

"Good morning, everybody," said Adam Granger, as he walked into the room.

"Good morning," said everybody.

"So Harry," said Adam, "Hermione tells us you're very good at defense against the dark arts."

Harry turned slightly pink. "I, well I guess I'm ok at that."

"Ok?" said Hermione, with an exasperated look on her face. "You're ahead of me in that class! No one else is! You're brilliant at it."

"Well, I'm sure you'll do better than me on the final exam," said Harry.

"We'll see," said Hermione.

"What other classes are you taking?" asked Marissa. "Hermione told us that in divination, the teacher predicts your death every day."

Harry chuckled slightly. "Yeah, I wish I could just drop it like Hermione. I only took it cause Ron signed up for it. I'm just not taking enough classes that I could drop one."

"You could always sign up for a different class next year," chimed in Hermione.

He smiled at this, "Maybe muggle studies will be good for a laugh."

"I didn't mean muggle studies. I'm thinking of dropping that class after this year. I'm afraid that it's a joke too. I honestly don't think the teacher of the class has ever met a muggle! It's irritating, though maybe you would find it funny, when he talks about ekel-tricity and meed-e-kane." At this point everyone at the table chuckled. "I thought it would be fascinating to hear about muggles from the wizarding perspective, but I found out that they don't know anything about muggles. You or I could teach the class much better than that professor does. They should require any teacher of that class to be muggle-raised! Anyway Harry, I was thinking you should try arithmency or ancient ruins."

"I'd probably flunk out of either class the first week," said Harry sadly. "I don't even really know what arithmency is anyway."

"Arithmency is a type of arithmetic course. How well did you do at math in muggle schools?"

"I used to get B's, but that was because if I did too much better than Dudley, I'd be locked up in my cupboard for a week." He ignored the

pitying looks he got from the Grangers. “I could have done even better. So I was actually pretty good at math.”

“Er, well I could tutor you in arithmency during the summer. I’m sure Professor McGonagall would allow you to take a placement test or something. You should talk to her when we get back to school.”

“Ok, I’ll try. Anything’s better than hearing that old fraud say how painful my soon-to-occur death’s gonna be.” Everyone laughed at that statement.

They continued discussing Harry’s classes while they finished breakfast. Hermione’s parents beamed at their daughter while she blushed when Harry declared that his grades have greatly improved since he started listening to Hermione. When they were finished, they all got into the car and started following the directions Harry had gotten from Gringotts.

Harry mentioned, “They said it’s under the same kind of charm that their house in Godric’s Hollow was under, except that the Potter heir, er, me, is automatically the Secret-Keeper. That means no one will see the house until I tell them the address.”

“Under the Fidelius Charm,” quoted Hermione, undoubtedly from some book, “No one but the Secret-Keeper is capable of divulging any information related to the location of the house, beyond the town where it is located. If someone tries to say the address, their mouth will involuntarily shut until they give up. If they try to write it down, their hands will open, causing them to drop their quill. Once the Secret-Keeper has revealed the address, the person who it was revealed to, that’s us, will have to concentrate on the address while staring at the spot for a few seconds before they’ll see it.”

“I guess your family has needed a lot of security,” said a concerned-looking Adam Granger.

“Just think,” said Hermione. “If they’d have just stayed at this house, You-Know-Who wouldn’t have found them.”

“You mean Sirius Black wouldn’t have been able to betray them!” said Harry.

“Harry,” said Hermione with a worried look, “He probably knows the location of this house.”

“No he doesn’t,” smiled Harry. “According to my letter from the goblins, when someone new becomes the heir, like when my parents died, everyone who knew the location of the manor forgets. Even Gringotts doesn’t know the address. They sent me a piece of parchment from my family vault that’s charmed so that I’m the only one that can read it. I copied the address and directions off of that and owled it back to them. They sent me confirmation with Hedwig that they put it back in the vault.”

They were driving through an open field until Harry’s eyes went wide. “Wow! Stop here.”

“What?” asked Adam, as he pulled over, “Do you need to use that old outhouse?” All everyone but Harry could see was an old outhouse in the middle of a field.

“Concentrate on the address, “1 Potter Avenue, and look to the right of the outhouse,” said Harry. Within seconds all the Grangers gasped as Potter Manor came into view. There was a huge white gate with the words, ‘Potter Manor’ engraved in gold at the top. The gate opened for them, revealing what was inside, including a driveway that Adam had to back up to get into. After they’d gotten out of the car, they all stared at the off-white brick mansion that was in front of them. It had at least seven floors. It looked simple, yet elegant, with a solid oak door with a brass handle. Before they went in, they explored the grounds a bit, which included a huge swimming pool, quidditch pitch, and picnic area with a pavilion with benches and tables. There was even a small forest on the grounds. What really surprised everyone is that the grounds appeared perfect. The grass was properly cut and the pavilion area was clean, and everything appeared to be in perfect order.

“I thought this place has been abandoned since you were a baby,” said Mr. Granger, appearing worried.

“I thought it was,” said Harry, pulling out his wand and noticing Hermione do the same. “Adam, Marissa, stay by the car while Hermione and I check this out.”

“We’re the adults here, we’ll take the risk,” he answered.

“Sir,” said Harry, “If there’s a dark wizard in there, you two don’t even have a fighting chance. You should be ready to leave if something happens.” Then he turned to Hermione. “I’ll go first, and you follow me after ten seconds. If I tell you to leave, then get out of here.”

“I won’t leave you,” said Hermione.

“You’d better do what he says, darling,” said Mrs. Granger.

Harry cautiously walked onto the porch, pointing his wand at the door. As soon as his feet touched the porch, the door opened. He slowly walked inside, and the door shut behind him, making him jump and turn around. He saw a note on the door. It said,

“Harry Potter, the greatest wizard in the world who is freeing Dobby.

After you is freeing Dobby, Dobby wanted to be thanking Harry Potter sir for doing it, so, Dobby is coming to Potter Manor and finding Potter house elf dead, and Potter Manor in chaos. So Dobby is burying Harry Potter’s family elf and cleaning Potter Manor for five days. Now Dobby is coming back to clean every week so that Harry Potter’s home is in good order if and when Harry Potter comes.

Sincerely,

Dobby, the house elf

P.S. If you is wanting to see Dobby, just call out Dobby’s name, and Dobby will come.

Harry smiled to himself at the thought of Dobby doing all that just for him. He was broken from his thoughts by loud banging on the door and Hermione’s voice desperately calling out, “Harry! Harry!”

He opened the door to see Hermione nearly on the verge of tears. “I’m sorry I didn’t open the door immediately. I was reading a note from Dobby.”

“Dobby, the house elf you freed from the Malfoys?”

“Yes. It turns out he’s been cleaning the place up for me.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I guess we should invite your parents in. I wonder why the door didn’t open for you.”

“Isn’t that obvious, Harry,” said Hermione. “You’re the master of the house. Its gate and front door will open for you, and only for you. You have to let anybody else inside.”

After the Grangers were all inside and had been assured nothing was wrong, Hermione read the note. She then looked at Harry. “Aren’t you going to call Dobby?”

“Of course,” said Harry. “I just wanted to get everyone inside first.” He then cleared his throat. “Dobby,” he called.

Immediately there was a pop and Dobby appeared, wearing the old pillowcase from the Malfoys and the sock that Harry had tricked Mr. Malfoy into giving him. As soon as he appeared, Dobby started hugging Harry’s legs. He heard a muffled, “Harry Potter is calling Dobby! Never before has Dobby been called by so great a wizard as Harry Potter!” He ended the embrace and looked at Harry with admiration in his eyes. “What can Dobby do for the great Harry Potter?”

“Er, Dobby, I just wanted to thank you for taking care of this mansion for me.”

“Dobby is happy and proud to clean Potter Manor.”

“Hello Dobby. Harry’s told me all about you. I’m Hermione Granger.” She then held out her hand to shake Dobby’s.

Dobby immediately cried. “I knew you must be great, to be Harry Potter’s friend, but never has a witch offered to shake Dobby’s hand, like an equal.” Dobby immediately took her hand and shook it, tears falling from his eyes. “And to think that the great Harry Potter speaks of Dobby.”

"Hermione is actually my girlfriend, and those are her parents over there."

Dobby at this point bowed to Hermione. "It is a great honor to meet Harry Potter's Granger."

How have you been doing since you were freed, Dobby? Have you found a new family to work for?" asked Hermione.

He hung his head down. "Dobby hasn't been able to find a wizard who is paying Dobby for his work. Dobby isn't wanting to be a slave, anymore. Dobby is wanting to work for pay, and it is very difficult for a house-elf who has been dismissed to get a new position, sir, very difficult indeed."

Harry noticed how Dobby had a hopeful look in his eyes and figured that he could certainly use the help. "Er, how much were you looking to be paid?"

Dobby looked excited at this prospect. "One Galleon a month, sir, and one day off every six months."

Hermione said, "That's way too low of wages! Harry, if you want to hire him, you should give him at least ten galleons a week, and weekends off."

Dobby looked scandalized. "Oh no sir! Dobby is not a greedy house elf! Dobby would die of shame to have more than one day off per month, and to get more than one galleon a week!"

"Fine," said Harry. "You're hired to work here for one galleon a week, with one day off per month," said Harry, before Hermione could object. Dobby shook Harry's hands ecstatically, and they both glowed for a second, sealing the magical contract.

"Harry Potter sir will not regret hiring Dobby! Dobby will work night and day for Harry Potter, not eating or sleeping..."

"That won't be necessary Dobby, you can eat and sleep." Harry then looked thoughtful for a moment. "Dobby," asked Harry, "How many

days have you worked here since you were freed from the Malfoy family?"

"One-hundred and sixteen glorious days, sir," declared Dobby proudly.

"That would make just over four months worth of work," Harry said, digging his hand in his pocket. "Here's seventeen galleons, and an extra three for doing such excellent work."

"Oh no, sir. Dobby cannot accept this, sir. Sir is too kind! Dobby wasn't hired yet."

"I insist, Dobby. You must take this money."

"I is sorry to insult Harry Potter. I is a bad house-elf. I is punishing myself."

"Wait, Dobby! You are never ever to punish yourself while working for me, is that clear!"

"Yes sir, but what about when Dobby is a bad elf?"

Harry took a deep breath and said, "If you feel you've done something wrong, tell me about it. I'll decide if you need to be punished."

"Yes, Harry Potter sir."

"Dobby," asked Harry, "Why didn't you tell me you were cleaning this house? I didn't even know it existed until recently."

Dobby looked bewildered. "You didn't sir? If Dobby knew that Harry Potter didn't know of his houses, Dobby would have told him. Dobby is a bad elf and should be punished, sir."

"I don't think you should be punished, Dobby. You didn't know," said Harry firmly.

"You is too kind, sir."

"Dobby," said Hermione, "how were you able to find this house? It's under the Fidelius Charm."

"Miss, the Fidelius Charm isn't stopping house elves from finding houses. Otherwise masters who is forgetting to tell their elves about it would be losing them. We is not able to reveal the location, or cause harm to the people in the house. You is safe, here."

Harry politely sent Dobby off to make lunch while he and Hermione found her parents exploring the house on their own.

"I apologize for, er, ignoring you when I was hiring Dobby."

"We understand Harry," said Adam, "You had business to conduct."

Together, they began exploring the house, starting with the floor they were on. To Hermione's delight, they found a library full of rare books. They also found what appeared to be an exercise room. The room they'd originally come in from was the living room, which had green carpet, and tan furniture. It had two couches and two recliners, which surrounded a clear glass oval table. There was also a fireplace that stood seven feet tall, obviously so people could floo from there in comfort. After Dobby was finished making lunch, he came and led them to the dining room, which had an antique wooden table and chairs. After lunch, they explored the other six floors. The top floor had the master bedroom, which was as big as the living room, with an incredibly comfortable king size bed, along with two antique dressers and an antique full length mirror on the wall. There was a walk in closet bigger than most people's bedroom, and it was full of fancy clothes, both wizarding and muggle, that had obviously belonged to James and Lily Potter. Seeing those clothes inspired Harry to open the dressers, which they found also full of clothes. There was also an attached bathroom that included a huge bathtub. There were four other huge bedrooms, including one with a crib and baby clothes, on that floor that each had their own private bathrooms.

The sixth floor had seven fully furnished bedrooms in it, with three bathrooms on that floor. The fifth floor seemed to be devoted to muggles. The layout was the same as the sixth floor, but only two of the rooms were furnished as bedrooms. Each room had plugs, with things like TV's, lamps, and clocks plugged into them. Hermione tested them and they worked. There was also a functioning phone in each of those rooms. One room had a pool table in the middle, and

had a rack on the wall holding pool sticks. There were chairs along one of the walls. The table was set with the balls in the triangle formation, ready to play. Another room had a ping pong table in it. There was another room that seemed devoted to old video games, with a TV and ancient game systems hooked to it, and another with a desk holding an old computer. Another room had a bigger TV with a vcr on it, with furniture facing it. Apparently it was devoted to watching movies. Harry made a mental note to replace the old muggle electronic equipment.

The fourth, third, and second floors also had the same layout as the sixth floor, although most of the rooms were completely unfurnished with a few exceptions, including a potions lab on the fourth floor that had a huge desk to work on, along with a cabinet full of all the ingredients you could ever need.

When they got back to the first floor, Hermione said, "Harry, let's visit the library again. I barely got to look at the books."

Harry smiled. "Why doesn't that surprise me?" He turned to her parents. "Adam, Marissa, you can come with us, or you can..."

"...if you don't mind, Harry," said Marissa, "I think we'd rather watch TV upstairs."

"Ok, we'll let you know when we're done," said Harry. "It shouldn't take Hermione more than three or four days to read every book there." Hermione slapped him lightly on the shoulder while her parents laughed.

"Don't hurry on our account," said Adam. "If you take too long, then we'll just have to spend the night here."

Harry and Hermione went into the library. While she was looking at the various books, he was looking at the portraits on the walls. He saw magical paintings of lions, dragons, and hippogriffs. There were also paintings of ships, carriages, and flying carpets, but what got his attention was a portrait of a man with unruly grey hair in the far corner. Some of his features were similar to Harry's, and he wondered if this was a long lost relative. He started to walk toward it when it spoke to him jovially, "You must be Harry Potter!"

Harry was stunned. "Er, yes I am. Who, who are you?"

"I knew it! You look just like your father, except for your eyes. You have your mother's eyes. My name is Julius Potter, and I'm your great, great...I don't even know how many greats. The point is that I'm your multi-great grandfather, and I built this mansion."

"Hold on, just one second, sir. I'd like you to meet someone." Then he turned and yelled, "Hermione, could you come here? I want to show you something!"

"You don't need to yell Harry, I'm right here," she said, emerging from behind the nearest bookshelf. "What do you want to show me?"

Harry motioned toward the portrait. "This is my multi-great grandfather who built this house, Julius Potter, and this is my girlfriend, Hermione Granger."

"It, it's good to meet you, sir," said a timid Hermione.

"And it's good to meet you too, Miss Granger. Now, I can answer any question you might have about Potter Manor, but the first piece of information that I think will interest the two of you is that no magic, underage or otherwise, done in this house or anywhere on the grounds can be detected by the Ministry of Magic or anyone else."

The two underage people he was speaking to smiled at this news. Hermione said, "That means we can do any spell we want to in here?"

"Absolutely!" said Julius. "We Potters have always thought that the age restriction on magic was rubbish." Harry laughed at that while Hermione looked scandalized.

"I suppose I should tell you about the security system. Since you're here, I'm sure you know that as the Potter heir, you are the Secret-Keeper for the house. You may not know that you are also the only person who can apparate or floo into this house also. You're also the only one who the gates and doors will open for. It's easy enough to change that if you'd like to. I'm the Security-Keeper. Just tell me who you'd like to be able to come in here which ways."

“Oh, um, for now, just the Granger’s. Hermione and her parents. The doors should open for them. Mr. and Mrs. Granger are muggles. Can they travel by floo?

“Certainly,” said Julius. “Mr. and Mrs. Evans flooed in here a lot before they died. I should also mention that the floo here is untraceable, so the ministry doesn’t know that anybody’s using the Potter floo. They probably don’t even know this house has a fireplace at all.”

“Wow!” said Hermione. “I read that it’s impossible to floo without the ministry knowing.”

Julius chuckled, “That’s what they’d like you to think, young lady. Let’s see, Harry. You want the doors to open and the floo to work for Miss Granger and her parents. Am I correct?”

“Yes.”

“By the way, before anyone, even you Harry, floos here, you’ll need to set the password. It may not always be prudent to call out, ‘Potter Manor,’ from wherever you’re coming from, so that name doesn’t work with our system. Your father’s password was, ‘Prongs’ place,’ but if you don’t mind my saying so, it also sounds suspicious. I’d suggest something that sounds ordinary, perhaps a mispronunciation of a common place to floo.”

Harry smiled and said, “Diagon Lily.”

Hermione said, “That’s brilliant, Harry! Everyone will think you’ve just mispronounced ‘Diagon Alley.’”

The portrait smiled in approval. “Brilliant! ‘Diagon Lily’ it is. Now, if you don’t mind my suggesting it, you may wish to allow Miss Granger to apparate here as well. I know she’s underage, but this way you won’t have to worry about it when she does learn. Besides, you may both want to learn it here a little early, since you can practice undetected.”

“Sure,” said Harry.

“I don’t think that’s wise, Harry! We could end up splinched!”

“I’m just agreeing to put your name on the list. We don’t have to try apparating if you don’t want to,” Harry said, trying to avoid an argument. “Besides, I plan to be too busy studying arithmancy this summer to bother with apparition.”

This earned a smile from Hermione. She then turned back to the portrait. “Mr. Potter, is it possible to fool the security system with magical disguises such as polyjuice potion?”

“That’s a very good question Miss Granger, I’m impressed. I’ll bet you do very well in school.”

“Yes she does. She’s at the top of our class,” bragged Harry, while putting his arm around her shoulder as her complexion turned pinker by the second. “You look so cute when you blush,” he said, and pecked her on the cheek, causing her to turn even more red as Julius started laughing.

“To answer your question, Miss Granger,” he said when he stopped laughing, “No. Polyjuice potion will not fool the system. Neither will any other known method. In fact, if someone came disguised as Harry or anyone else allowed in the house, the system would let them enter the house and be immediately stupefied and locked in a magical cage until Harry personally releases them.”

“Er,” said Hermione. “Not to be morbid, but what would happen if Harry dies, since right now he’s the only living Potter?”

Harry remained silent. He was actually curious too, but he’d never ask that question.

Julius’ head hung down. “If there is no Potter heir, and the heir has not named a successor, then if anyone is being held by the security system at the moment of his death, they are killed, because they were most likely involved. Then the security system of the house shuts down, and it becomes visible and accessible to all magical people.”

“A successor?” asked Harry.

“Yes. Since right now you are the last Potter, you may name someone to inherit the house, along with its security system, upon your death.”

“You mean like Hermione?”

“I don’t want...”

“Anybody you wish. If the house can’t stay with the Potter family, it would at least stay with friends of the Potter family.”

“Then I name Hermione Granger as my successor.”

“What? No,” protested Hermione.

“It’s done,” said Julius.

“Hermione, it’s not like I’m planning on dying. It’s just that if that happens, I’d feel better knowing that you get this house rather than put it on a public auction for the Malfoys to buy cheap.”

“All right, Harry,” she said, defeated by his logic. “Just remember, I love you, not this house. I don’t want to inherit it.”

“I’ll do my best to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“Make sure you do,” said Hermione, who turned back to the portrait and said, “Sir, I noticed that the fifth floor has working muggle plugs and phone lines. How is that possible? There are no power or phone lines going into this house.”

“You really are observant,” said the smiling portrait. “Those plugs have been charmed to work for muggle devices. Lily Potter, who was quite brilliant, invented the charms so that her family would feel more comfortable here. I don’t understand how they work, but I believe she left her notes in this very library if you want to find them.”

“That’s great, Hermione! We should find that book!”

“Of course,” she said, “It should be very interesting reading.”

“Yes it should, Hermione,” said Harry, “I was hoping you could figure out if you could modify the charm for the phone plugs.”

“Why?” asked Hermione.

“I was planning on buying a computer, along with a lot of other electronic equipment, and I was hoping you could make a faster Internet connection for me.”

She smiled. “I’ll try, but I’m also gonna make sure it can’t go to adult sites!” Harry laughed.

“Let’s just find the book, Hermione. Julius, it’s been great talking to you! I’m sure I’ll be talking to you soon.”

“Ok. Just don’t make me wait another thirteen years, Harry,” he said. “It gets rather boring.”

Harry and Hermione then began searching the library. They each started on separate ends. While he was looking through the books, he noticed one called, ‘Mind Reading,’ which he took off the shelf to look at later. More than once he’d felt that Snape could read his mind, and he thought that book might be able to explain how, and maybe even tell him how to prevent it. He continued looking at the other books for a few minutes until he heard Hermione’s voice, “Harry, I found it!”

“Great!” Harry called out. “Let’s go to the living room where it’ll be more comfortable.”

“Ok.”

When they got there, they sat on a sofa together and Hermione noticed the book in Harry’s hand. “What’s that?” she asked.

“A book on mind reading I found on a shelf. I think Snape does that to me, and I thought this book might explain how, maybe even how to stop him.”

“Let me see it?” asked Hermione. He handed her the book, and she immediately flipped to the introduction. She said, “This book says legilimency is a type of mind reading that requires eye contact.”

“That’s exactly it! Every time he’s seemed to read my mind, he’s been looking me in the eye! Is there a way to stop it?”

“Yes,” said Hermione smiling. “This book also teaches occlumency, which defends the mind against legilimency. If you want, we can study it together.”

“I think I’d really like that, Hermione,” he said, taking her hand in his.

At that moment, Dobby appeared in front of them. “Please excuse Dobby, Harry Potter, sir, but Dobby wonders if Harry Potter would like dinner for himself and his Grangers.”

“Actually, now that you mention it, I’m starved,” said Harry.

“Good. Dobby has dinner all prepared in the dining room. Now Dobby will tell Mr. and Mrs. Granger.”

“Er, Dobby,” said Hermione. “Instead of popping in front of them without warning, go outside the door to the room they’re in and knock.”

“Yes Miss Granger,” said Dobby, and then he disappeared with a small pop.

After they’d eaten the dinner Dobby prepared, they left the manor, and Hermione brought the mind reading book, as well as Lily Potter’s book on charming plugs to work, with them. Her parents agreed to take them to an electronics store the next day, so that Harry could properly furnish his house with modern equipment.

When they got to the Granger residence, Harry and Hermione went into his bedroom and talked about the two books, which she had skimmed through on the way home.

"I'd suggest that you start studying occlumency while I study legilimency," suggested Hermione, "so that I can test your progress. Then we'll switch, so you can test my occlumency."

"Makes sense," said Harry.

"Although the first part of occlumency is something we can both start practicing immediately."

"What's that?" asked Harry.

"Clearing our minds before bed."

"That sounds easy enough," said Harry, skeptically.

"It probably is," said Hermione, "but it's only the first step. There's a lot more to it than that. You have to learn to build mental shields around your thoughts. The book says that if a strong legilimens performs a powerful mental assault on someone who hasn't developed those shields, it'll be extremely painful, and completely open their mind to attack. It can even do serious brain damage."

"I hope that's not what you're planning," said Harry with a smirk.

"Of course not, Harry. The book suggests starting with light assaults, and slowly increasing the strength of the attack. It's sort of like lifting weights. You start off with less weight and work your way up."

"That sounds better," said Harry.

"The book also says that muggles can learn occlumency," said Hermione. "They can't learn to read other people's thoughts, but they can shield their own."

"Really," said Harry nonchalantly.

"Don't you realize what this means?" asked Hermione excitedly.

"Not really," said Harry.

"My parents can learn to shield their thoughts! That way no one can read their minds to find out anything about you! I'm going to talk them

into letting me teach it to them this summer," said Hermione confidently.

"While you're teaching me arithmency?" asked Harry.

"Exactly. We'll start our mind reading lessons though, tomorrow night when we get back from your house."

Harry sighed. "Ok. What did you learn from my mother's journal?"

Hermione beamed. "That she was an absolute genius!" Harry smiled at this. "She did years of research and experimentation, probably starting in her second year at Hogwarts, eventually creating a simple charm to produce power, and a slightly more complex one for muggle communication systems, such as phones. It's easily adaptable to any communication system. I just have to provide some technical specifications. The point is that I'll be able to get you a great Internet connection! I just wish I could do it here."

"Couldn't you make the plug at my house and bring it here?" said Harry. "I know it's not connected to anything in the wall."

"You're right!" said Hermione. "Why didn't I think of it? The wall has absolutely nothing to do with it! I just transfigure it to the shape I need for the plug. I'll just make a few portable Internet plugs while I'm there. I could even put us on a magical private network!"

"That sounds awesome!" said Harry. "If you can make portable Internet plugs, could you make portable electric plugs or batteries?"

"Yes! I know I could make electric plugs, and I'm sure I could make magical batteries of any type that will never run out of power with your mum's research!"

"Wow!" said Harry. "If I got a laptop computer, could you make it so that the battery is always charged and it's always on the Internet?"

"Of course, but you'd have to be careful who knows about it," said Hermione. "That might technically be a 'misuse of a muggle artifact.' Mr. Weasley might have to arrest us."

“Are you sure?” asked Harry. “It won’t be doing anything that the muggle laptops can’t do; it’ll just do them better.”

“I’m not sure, Harry. I think we should read the statute, and maybe ask Mr. Weasley before you get a laptop.”

“Ok. I’ll wait on that idea,” said Harry. “Speaking of Mr. Weasley, I’ll bet he would love to get a copy of this book!”

“I’m sure he would. If you wanted, we could magically copy it when we go back to the mansion, but I’d suggest disguising his copy so that it doesn’t look like your mum wrote it. You can claim you found it at a second-hand book shop. Otherwise it would lead to questions we don’t want to answer.”

“I, I think I will do that,” said Harry, smiling. “We may have a problem with Ron, but not with Mr. Weasley. He’s never been anything but nice to us.”

“Ok, we just have to remember to bring the book with us,” said Hermione. She then turned to Harry with a concerned look in her eyes. “Now, how did you feel about being in your parents’ house?”

“I don’t know. It was, well, weird. I mean, I didn’t feel like crying or anything like that, but it’s I don’t know.” Harry sighed. “I hope I can find out more about my parents there.”

Hermione hugged him and kissed him on the cheek. “Goodnight Harry.” Hermione left his room.

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True to their word, the next morning at breakfast the Grangers announce they were going to an electronics store. After Harry mentioned some of the things he planned on purchasing, Mr. Granger suggested they rent a truck for the day. Before long, Harry found himself alone in a rental truck with his girlfriend’s father.

“That’s some place you’ve got,” said Adam Granger.

“I suppose so,” said Harry. “I was a bit surprised when I found out just how much my parents left me.”

“They certainly did leave you a lot.”

“Of course I’m happy they left me that much,” said Harry, “but I’d have been happy if Potter Manor were only a shack, as long as it’s away from the Dursleys.”

“They must have been awful to live with. Why did they even let you go to Hogwarts?”

Harry smiled. “Well, for my first year, they were afraid Hagrid would come and get me if they didn’t let me go there, and they thought I wouldn’t be able to find Platform nine and three quarters. They told me it didn’t exist, but I’ll bet anything that Aunt Petunia had seen my mum go through the barrier when she was a student! She’s probably been on the platform herself. The next year, on my twelfth birthday, the Dursleys locked me up in my room for the summer, only letting me out once in the morning and once at night to go to the bathroom.”

“What?” exclaimed Mr. Granger, horrified at this idea. “How’d you eat?”

“They put a cat flap on the door, and Aunt Petunia would put a little something through it every day. Anyway, I only got out of there when Ron Weasley and two of his brothers rescued me in the middle of the night. I spent the rest of the summer with the Weasleys.”

“That was nice of them.”

“Yeah,” said Harry nodding. “It was.”

“I understand you’re not getting along with Ron anymore,” said Adam.

“Yeah,” said Harry, looking down with regret.

“What happened between you?”

“I guess it started when I took Hermione’s side at Christmas over my broomstick. Did she tell you anything about that?”

“Yes,” Adam said, “She said she went behind your back and turned it in to a professor to have it checked for hexes.”

“Yes, that’s about it. At first I was upset, but I knew she must have had a reason. She wouldn’t just do that out of spite or something. When I asked her to explain why she did it, Ron yelled at me and stormed off.”

“What did he do then?”

“Well,” said Harry. “He pretty much ignored us, so Hermione and I spent a lot more time together, and grew closer. The next time Ron spoke to us, he’d caught kissing and yelled some very, er, unkind things at us, getting Hermione so mad that she hexed him. After a few weeks of not getting along, he apologized, and he started hanging out with us again.”

“Hermione told me about that. He kept glaring at you all the time, so you asked him to stop hanging out with you any more.”

“Yeah, and a few days ago, when he found out I was spending the break with Hermione, he accused us of something that caused Hermione to kick him in the groin.”

Adam chuckled, “I guess he won’t be insulting you guys any time soon.”

Harry smiled, “I guess not.”

“So basically, he got mad when you two got together.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“I wonder if he’s jealous of you.”

“Hmm,” said Harry. “Could be. In any case, I’m not gonna apologize for loving Hermione.”

Mr. Granger, who was waiting at a stop light, turned to face Harry. “You really do love her, don’t you?”

Harry looked Hermione's father in the eyes, "Yes I do, sir."

"It's hard to imagine that you're in love at your age, but I believe you."

"I am," said Harry.

"Just make sure you don't move things too fast. I know I can't exactly threaten a wizard like you, but I'll be very disappointed in you if you hurt my daughter."

"I promise you, I would never hurt Hermione," said Harry. "Not because I'm afraid of anyone, but because I care about her."

"I know."

Not long after, they arrived at the electronics store, with Hermione and her mother in the car right behind them.

As soon as they got inside, they were immediately intercepted by a saleswoman, who asked if she could help.

"You certainly can," said Harry. "We've got a lot on our list."

The first thing Harry got was the best gaming computer they had, along with a twenty inch flat screen monitor and a color laser printer. He then picked out various software and games to go with it. He then picked out two fifty-inch screen TV's and a thousand watt surround sound system for each. He bought the latest video game systems, along and several games to go with them. He also bought a DVD Player and several movies. At Hermione's insistence, he bought a cd player for every room on the first, seventh, and fifth floor of the house. The ones for bedrooms were cd alarm clocks. The one for the living room was a cd changer stereo system, while the rest were boom boxes. He also bought a bunch of cd's, along with racks that could hold all of his cds, software, and games.

When they got the bill, the Grangers gasped, but Harry simply pulled out the money. The cashier was surprised that he paid in cash, and probably thought he was a drug dealer, but wisely decided to mind his own business. They had help loading the equipment into the truck

securely about an hour after they'd arrived, and then headed to the mansion.

This time Harry rode with Mrs. Granger in the car while Hermione rode with her father in the truck.

"Hermione has told me about some of your adventures together," said Marissa.

"Er, has she?" said Harry, suddenly feeling hot under the collar.

"Yes. She says that on Halloween during your first year, before you were actually friends, you and Ron Weasley rescued her from some kind of a monster."

"Er, a mountain troll."

"She said that she would have died if you hadn't gone after her. Nobody else did. Why did you go after her?"

"Er, well, I guess that at first she didn't have any friends, but for some reason, she seemed to attach herself to us. I certainly understood what it was like not to have any friends, cause my cousin Dudley and his gang would beat up anybody in school that wanted to be my friend." She gasped. "Anyway, I probably would've been her friend earlier, but Ron, my very first friend, couldn't stand her. He was partnered with her in a class that day, and she did a lot better than him, so he was jealous and insulted her when he thought she couldn't hear, but she did, and ran off crying. When we were at dinner, we found out she was still crying in a girls' bathroom, and I felt really bad about it. I mean, I should have stood up for her but I didn't. Anyway, when we found out that there was a troll loose in the castle, all the students were supposed to go to the towers. I realized that she didn't know about the troll, so I told Ron that we had to go find her. He reluctantly followed me. Anyway, we found her and the troll and, er, managed to knock it out. When the teachers found us, she took the blame, and well, we've been friends ever since. At least Hermione and I have."

"That was really brave of you. It seems that Ron and Hermione's friendship was more based on you. You made Ron follow you to help

her, and being friends with you made Hermione put up with Ron, while Ron put up with Hermione. I wonder if Ron was ever Hermione's friend."

Harry shook his head. "I just don't know if he was ever even my friend anymore. I thought so, but with the way he's acting now, I don't know."

"The funny thing is, that in her letters, as well as in person, she's always talking about you. Even before you were dating, it was Harry this and Harry that. Occasionally it was Harry and Ron, but the only time Ron was mentioned alone was when she was mad at him for something. I'll the letter over Christmas where she said you'd taken her side over Ron's over that broomstick, the, er, firebolt, I believe." Harry nodded. "She was so happy that you understood. She'd been genuinely afraid that she was going to lose her only friends, but your safety was more important to her, especially after that fall you took during that quidditch match. Her next letter didn't surprise me when it said you were dating."

When they arrived at the manor, the gate opened for them and they drove in. Harry and Hermione levitated the TV's through the door, which now opened for Hermione. While the teenagers were levitating the TV's to the fifth floor, Hermione's parents started carrying the more manageable items into the house. When the TV's were both in place, Harry and Hermione went back down to help carry more stuff in. Harry had suggested levitating everything, but Hermione insisted that they shouldn't get lazy, nor would it be wise to get into the habit of doing everything magically. After everything was inside, Hermione went around the house creating magical plugs and batteries, setting up the cd players. Meanwhile the others hooked up the TV's and computer. When she was finished, she found that both TV's were properly hooked up with their sound systems and equipment, so she magically set them both up to receive satellite. When she reached the computer room however, Harry and the adult Grangers were having a hard time setting that up. Sighing, she quickly took over, and before long, Harry's computer was up and running with a T-1 connection to the Internet, and set up as the host for their private network. Hermione and Harry then banished the garbage left from the boxes. Harry then put one of the old TV's into his bedroom (along with both

the vcr and old video game system), and the other in another seventh floor bedroom. Hermione set them to receive satellite, too.

Harry then asked no one in particular, “What should I do with this old computer?”

The adult Grangers shrugged their shoulders, while Hermione brightened up. “I know, you should put it in the library.”

“The library?” asked Harry. “Why?”

She looked surprised that he didn’t understand. “Well, for one thing, we could set up some sort of book inventory system with it.”

Harry sighed, “Another summer project,” causing Mr. and Mrs. Granger to chuckle.

“For another thing, we could take notes from any book that you happen to be reading. You should probably get another printer for the library. I wonder if we could magically modify one to print on parchment...”

“Ok, ok, Hermione. You’ve convinced me. We’ll take it down to the library.”

Mr. Granger carried the monitor, Harry carried the cpu, and Hermione carried the keyboard and mouse. When they arrived, Hermione went to work on the computer, while Harry chatted with Julius Potter’s portrait, introducing him to Hermione’s parents. Hermione gave the computer a magical T-1 connection to the Internet and set it on their network. She then made her own portable T-1 connection for her computer. She then copied Lily Potter’s book as requested. After that, Harry had Dobby empty the dressers in the master bedroom so he could put his clothes, most of which he’d brought along, in one of them. Then Dobby made lunch for them. When they were through eating, they left the mansion.

They spent the rest of the week visiting museums, a zoo, and many other points of interest in the London area. Harry insisted on paying for half of the expenses. He found that he got along very well with Hermione’s parents, which made her very happy. Hermione hooked

up her computer to the magical T-1 line, and was extremely pleased with the results. They continued to study occlumency. While Harry was making good progress with his mental shields, Hermione had mastered legilimency, and was beginning to study occlumency. As was planned, Hermione used her legilimency to help Harry to practice occlumency. She started out gentle in her assault of his mind until he had mastered that level of defense, and then started assaulting with a little more force each time, forcing him to strengthen his shields. She guessed that he'd master occlumency within two weeks, and legilimency in two more weeks at this rate. She also reasoned that school work would probably slow them down some, so it may take slightly longer than that. In any case, she was positive he'd be a master at both by the time school got out for the summer.

Harry had gotten a thank you note from Mr. Weasley for the book, along with an invitation for the two of them to go to the Quidditch World Cup that summer if he could get the tickets.

Before they knew it, they were on the Hogwarts express, returning for the last leg of the school year. They once again had their own compartment, and the ride was going smoothly. They were talking about Lily Potter's journal.

"...and so because the batteries are magical, I wondered whether or not my cd player would work at Hogwarts. That's why I decided to bring it, along with a few cds, to school," Hermione said.

"You know, that's actually a great idea! If that works maybe I can get one of those portable video game systems to work there." Harry had made it a point to study his mother's journal also, and could now make electric plugs and batteries. "It would certainly be a lot more fun than losing chess to Ron!"

Hermione laughed at that. "I suppose..."

Whatever she supposed would remain a mystery to Harry, because at that moment, the train stopped. They heard the doors open as the lights went out. "Dementors," Harry said, as both he and Hermione pulled out their wands. While sitting there in the cold darkness, they heard compartment after compartment being opened, followed by the sounds of students whimpering and crying. Harry used his

occlumency shields to protect his mind from the dementor assault to the very best of his ability as he prepared for the worst. As their door opened, he remained focused on the moment, while he could barely hear his memory of Voldemort's attack. He forced that out of his mind, and focused on his favorite memory, the memory of his first kiss. "Expecto Patronum," he yelled at the dementor, barely registering the fact that Hermione had done the same thing at the same time. He watched a silvery stag come out of his wand and join a silvery otter that had come out of Hermione's wand. Together, they chased the dementors out of their compartment, and off the train. As the lights came back on, Hermione could see that Harry looked perfectly normal, and was very proud of the fact that Harry seemed to be unaffected by the dementors.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

Harry took a deep breath. "Happy Hermione, and free."

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## Chapter 8 – Buckbeak’s Escape

Starts in ...

...The Prisoner of Azkaban – Chapter 16 – Professor Trelawney’s Prediction

After they got back to school, time seemed to speed up as they worked their way toward their final exams. Harry found himself knocking on the door to Professor McGonagall’s office.

“Come in,” he heard her voice say from the other side of the door. He opened it and stepped inside. “Mr. Potter, how did you enjoy your Easter break? I believe this is the first time you’ve left the castle for it.”

“Yes it is, Professor,” said Harry nervously. “I very much enjoyed the Granger’s hospitality.”

“To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit,” said Minerva softly, apparently sensing his unease.”

“I, er, would like to talk about my schedule for next year.”

“Next year?” said Harry’s head of house, surprised. “Normally the students take the same classes in fourth year that they took in third year.”

“I know. I’d er, like to drop divination and take arithmancy instead,” Harry said quickly, while he still had the nerve.

Professor McGonagall smiled slightly at this statement. “I can quite understand why you’d prefer a more, shall we say, respectable discipline. But it would be difficult if not impossible for you to start arithmancy a year late.”

“Hermione’s agreed to tutor me in it this summer,” said Harry pleadingly. He then sighed. “I’m really getting tired of my death being predicted every day. I’m not learning anything except that I hate that subject. Hermione said that arithmancy is a type of math, and I always did well at math in muggle school.”

“Well,” Professor McGonagall sighed, “I’m not sure if I should. It would take a lot of work on your part. I know that you’ve improved tremendously since Christmas, but...”

“I promise I’ll do whatever work I have to,” Harry said pleadingly. “Please professor. I made a mistake signing up for divination, and I don’t want it to haunt me for the rest of my time at Hogwarts.”

She took a deep breath and smiled again. “Very well Potter, I’ll give you your chance. You will have to take an entrance exam during the summer which will cover the same material as the final exam that Miss Granger will be taking shortly. It will have to be before your Hogwarts letters arrive, which means you should be prepared in mid-July. The school will owl you when an exact time and date is determined. If you pass the test, you will be allowed to take the course. If not, then I’m afraid you will be stuck with divination.”

“Thank you professor,” said Harry, with a smile on his face.

“You’re welcome, Harry,” said McGonagall softly. “You’re dismissed.”

True to Hermione’s prediction, on the day before the final quidditch match against Slytherin, she happily announced to Harry, “You did it! You are now both a master occlumens and legilimens! You said my exact thoughts!”

Harry smiled. “Thanks. I don’t know about being a ‘master’ at them, but...”

“There is always room for improvement, Harry,” said Hermione. “But we’ve both learned everything we can from this book. Now the only way for us to improve is practice.”

“All right,” conceded Harry. “Have you noticed the way that Snape has been trying to get me to look him in the eyes since we got back from Easter break?”

“Yes, of course,” said Hermione. “He always has, but now we notice because we’ve learned what he’s doing.”

“Today, he actually did manage to look me in the eyes for a second, and I felt a tingling sensation.”

Her eyes went wide. “What happened then?”

“I automatically put my shields up, and he visibly stumbled backwards for a second, and then I put my head down.”

“I saw him stumble, but I didn’t know what caused it. Then he took ten points from you for tripping him, when you weren’t anywhere near him.”

“That’s Snape for you!” said Harry. “At least he didn’t give me detention.”

“How does a teacher like that stay at Hogwarts?” said Hermione. “Doesn’t Professor Dumbledore know about it?”

“Of course he knows,” yelled Harry, causing Hermione to back up. “Sorry. But if he knows what his students do, he knows what his teachers do. And if he doesn’t, it’s his responsibility as headmaster to find out. He has to know that everyone except the Slytherin’s hate Snape!” Harry said, standing up and beginning to pace. “He should find out why. I think he can make himself invisible to spy on classes. And if he can’t, he can come and borrow my cloak! Come to think of it, he also must know that most students believe that Trelawney is a fraud! Even Professor McGonagall thinks so! She must have told him!”

“You’re right,” said a scandalized-looking Hermione. “And I’ve told you about the muggle studies professor! Why doesn’t he do something about it?”

“What about Quirrel and Lockhart?” added Harry.

“But, but it’s his responsibility to make sure that we receive a quality education from Hogwarts, but he’s not even trying. At least this year we have a good defense teacher, but you’re right. Our first two defense professors were useless. Our potions professor is useless. The only reason I do good in that class is because I learn from the book, not him! Although in your case, he’s so unprofessional that it

wouldn't matter if you quoted the entire textbook verbatim on one of his tests. He'd still flunk you! We also have useless muggle studies and divination teachers! But at least we realize they're useless. A lot of students go through those classes and think they learned something! This is terrible! Somebody has to do something about it!" said Hermione, a determined look forming in her eyes."

"But what can we do?"

"We can start by making a detailed list of our complaints about the quality of education here, and then send a copy to Professor Dumbledore."

"Like that'll do a lot of good," said Harry sarcastically.

"If he doesn't do anything about it, we'll send a copy to every member of the school board. If that doesn't help, we'll send it to the ministry of magic itself."

Harry looked thoughtful. "Hm. Maybe something like that could work, but it couldn't be just us. Maybe if we got a few hundred students to sign it like a petition..."

"A petition!" squealed Hermione, surprising Harry with a quick kiss. "Yes, that's it! He'll have to sack them if enough students demand it! We should form a student government..."

"Hold on Hermione," said Harry smiling. "One thing at a time! Let's put together our list of complaints, and then quietly get people to sign it. I don't think we should bother with Slytherin student, or Percy, for that matter."

"Percy? Why not? He's head boy."

"He'd also sell his mother to Filch for a bigger badge," said Harry sarcastically. "Haven't you noticed how much he flaunts his authority? The way it's gone to his head. I'm sure that he'll take the petition as rebellion against authority and try to confiscate it and give us detention."

"I'm not sure about that," said Hermione skeptically.

"If you'd like, ask his siblings about it. I guess we shouldn't trust his girlfriend either."

Hermione took a deep breath. "Fine Harry, I'll trust you on this. When should we try to get it done so we can present a copy to Dumbledore?"

"Truthfully, I think it would be best for everyone who signs it, including myself, to present it after grades have been handed out. You KNOW Snape will fail everyone on the list, even you, if he sees it before then."

"You're probably right, Harry. Unfortunately, contrary to what that greasy git thinks of himself, he is one of the least professional teachers here!"

"Anyway," said Harry, changing the subject, "We were talking about occlumency."

"Oh yes," said Hermione. "If you don't mind, I'd like to send the book to my parents so they can study it now."

"Sure," said Harry. "Why now?"

"Well, the more they learn from the book, the less time I have to spend teaching them, which would leave me with time to do...other things," Hermione said with a wink, causing Harry to go scarlet.

The next day, Gryffindor won the house cup mainly because of Harry's seeker skills. Hermione sent the occlumency book to her mother, requesting that she and her father practice occlumency, so that no one would be able to steal information on Harry from them. She promised she'd try to read their minds when she finished the term. Quietly they'd gotten the petition signed, and every member of the Gryffindor quidditch team had signed the petition, as well as many other students from Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw. Final exams began. Due to Hermione's help, Harry was doing quite well on his exams. Before they knew it, it was the last day of exams, and they were headed toward Professor Lupin's obstacle course.

"Well, this should be fun," said Harry with a smile on his face.

“Er, well, yes. It should be, er, fun,” said a very nervous Hermione.

“What are you nervous about, Hermione? You’ll be at the top of the class.”

“I doubt it, Harry. You’re better than me in defense.” Hermione looked to Harry like she expected to die during the exam.

“I doubt I will, but what if I do? Will you be mad at me?” He then looked around suspiciously and whispered, “I could make sure you do better than me, if that’ll make you happy.”

“No, you can’t,” Hermione practically yelled. “You’ve got to do your best!”

‘All right, just please stop worrying. You’ll make yourself sick.’

“I’ll try.”

After Harry had beaten Hermione, who’d been stopped by a boggart who took on Professor McGonagall’s appearance and said she’d failed all her classes, and was the worst disgrace that Griffindor has ever had. The boggart/McGonagall went on to say that if she wants to continue her education, she’ll have to repeat this year, and she’ll be transferred to Hufflepuff’s house because she wasn’t worthy to be a Griffindor anymore. After the exam was over, Harry held back his laughter so he could comfort her after that ordeal. While they were walking toward the Great Hall, they ran into Minister Fudge, who proved conclusively to Harry that he is in Mr. Malfoy’s pocket and cares nothing about justice. He actually brought the executioner to the appeal! Hermione still had hope for Buckbeak, but admitted that it was a fool’s hope.

After lunch, they separated for their exams. Harry found himself alone with Ron, who had happily signed the petition the day Gryffindor won the cup, waiting for whatever test Trelawney had in store for him. Ron, who’d been avoiding both Harry and Hermione since before Easter, decided to speak first. “Dad said he invited you to the world cup if he can get the tickets.”

Harry nodded, trying to be somewhat friendly. "Uh-huh. That was nice of him. It sounds like a lot of fun."

"Oh yeah!" said Ron, always ready to talk quidditch. "I hope that Bulgaria gets there! I'd love to see Krum in action!"

"Who?" asked Harry, but he never got his answer. Ron was called away to take his test before he could respond.

When Ron came out, he told Harry that she had him look into a crystal ball, and he'd made up things that he saw. Harry decided to do the same thing. He made up a story about seeing Buckbeak fly away, which didn't seem to please his instructor. Before he left, though, she scared him with what seemed to be a real prophecy.

After he got out of there, he went to Hermione who told him she'd just gotten a letter from Hagrid that said he'd lost the appeal and they were going to execute the hippogriff at sunset. After they decided to sneak to Hagrid's after dinner, he told Hermione about Trelawney's prophecy. She simply laughed it off, but he insisted that this was different. She then said, "So what if it is a prophecy? What good does knowing about it do? If something's just going to happen anyway, what difference does it make to know beforehand?"

Harry decided to concede, knowing that if he didn't, she'd keep at him until he did. Before they knew it, they were inside Hagrid's hut, and Hermione had just discovered Scabbers. Almost as soon as she had Harry pick up the old rat, they heard voices outside and snuck out the back door under the cloak. Almost as soon as they got outside, Scabbers bit Harry and ran off. While he was rubbing his wound, he and Hermione saw a big black dog start chasing the rat. Harry said, "Oh well, what Ron doesn't know won't hurt him," causing Hermione to giggle. He looked over at Buckbeak and said, "I'm going to free Buckbeak!" and ran out of the cloak and straight at the tethered hippogriff, leaving a stunned Hermione behind.

After bowing to Buckbeak and untying him, Harry started pulling on his rope. They got out sight just before Hagrid's front door opened and Fudge, along with everyone else, saw that the condemned animal was nowhere to be found. Hermione's disembodied voice

whispered, “We’ve got to find a place to hide Beaky until we figure out what to do.” Any suggestions?”

Harry hadn’t really thought beyond untying the animal and his face showed it. “Er, we could try hiding him under the cloak.” He never heard Hermione’s reply, because at that moment, the black dog they’d seen earlier ran past them straight under the trunk of the Whomping Willow with something furry in its teeth, and Buckbeak ran after the dog, disappearing under the tree as well.

Harry got back under the cloak with his girlfriend, and they looked at each other for a few seconds before Hermione said, “I doubt they’ll find him under there.”

Harry laughed and said, “We should get back to the castle.”

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The next day, when Harry and Hermione were eating lunch at the Gryffindor table, they was surprised to find a disheveled but cheerful Professor Lupin walking up to them. He whispered to them, “If you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to speak to both you and Hermione in my office once you’re finished.”

When they arrived at his office, he closed the door and charmed it for privacy.

Lupin looked at the two students in front of him and sighed. “Well, I’ve got a strange tale to tell you.”

“A strange tale, sir?” repeated Hermione.

“Yes,” said the professor. “It started last night while I was watching the two of you on the Marauder’s map.”

Both Harry and Hermione looked at each other, sure that they were in trouble for freeing Buckbeak.”

“Don’t worry,” smiled Lupin. “This is not about your saving an innocent creature from a terrible fate.”

They both looked relieved for a second, and then confused. Harry spoke first, "Then, what is this about, Professor Lupin?"

"Well, the reason I was watching the map was because I thought you might sneak off and visit Professor Hagrid. I was right. I saw the two of you go into Hagrid's hut, but when you left, you had someone else with you."

"No we didn't," said Harry.

"Just Ron Weasley's rat, Scabbers," added Hermione.

"Scabbers?" said Lupin, looking amused. "Is that what Ron calls him?" The two kids nodded. "The map calls him Peter Pettigrew."

"That's impossible," said Harry. "Peter Pettigrew is..."

"Dead," said Lupin. "That's what everyone, including me, believed. Sirius Black was sent to Azkaban for his murder. In just a few days, two of my three best friends were killed while the other was responsible for it and sent to prison."

"Your three best friends?" asked Hermione.

"Yes. James Potter, Peter Pettigrew, and Sirius Black. When I first came to Hogwarts, they were my best friends. They each became animagi. James was a stag, Sirius a black dog, and Peter a rat."

"My dad could become a stag, like my patronus?" asked Harry. Lupin nodded. "Hold on, are you telling me that Peter Pettigrew has been living with Ron, and in my dormitory, all this time?"

"Yes," said Lupin.

"Why?" asked Hermione.

"Because Peter was the traitor, not Sirius. He faked his own death by cutting off his own finger and leaving it for evidence. He killed everyone Sirius was accused of killing."

"How do you know this?" asked Hermione.

“I have to get back to my story,” said Lupin. “We all had nicknames. I was called Moony...”

“Because you’re a were...” said Hermione.

“A werewolf?” Lupin looked surprised. “You really are the brightest witch of your age! How long have you known?”

“A, a werewolf?” said Harry, tensing up.

“Hush, Harry,” said Hermione. “Since Professor Snape assigned the essay.”

“He should be pleased about that. Yes, I suppose I should let you know. The reason they became animagi was so that they could stay with me during my transformations. Every month at the full moon I was snuck over through the passage that starts under the Whomping Willow that ends at the Shrieking Shack.” Harry and Hermione both gasped. “Well, it didn’t take James and Sirius long to figure out that I was always sick or away on the full moons. They came up with the idea of becoming animagi, and that made my transformations almost enjoyable. Anyway, I was called Moony; Peter was called Wormtail; Sirius was called Padfoot; and James was called Prongs.”

“The map,” said Harry.

“Yes,” said Lupin. “The reason I immediately recognized the Marauder’s map was because I was one of the mapmakers. By the way, that’s what we called ourselves, the Marauders. Anyway Harry, when your parents were hiding from Voldemort, everyone thought that Sirius was their Secret-Keeper, but he wasn’t. It was Peter. Sirius had suggested making Peter Secret-Keeper because no one would suspect that James would trust little Peter with such a task. It turned out that trusting Peter was the biggest mistake of their lives. That rodent went straight to Voldemort and led him right to your parents!” Hermione grabbed Harry’s hand. “The next day, Sirius went after Peter to avenge your parents’ deaths. He cornered Peter, who started shouting out how Sirius had been the traitor. He then cut off his finger, broke the sidewalk, transformed, and ran off to find a wizarding family to live with, and wait for news of Voldemort.”

“The Weasleys.”

Lupin nodded. “The Weasleys. Last summer, their family’s picture was in the Daily Prophet, and Wormtail was with Ron in the picture. Minister Fudge happened to visit Azkaban that day, and had that newspaper with him. While he was there, Sirius asked to borrow the paper. He saw the front page, and immediately recognized the rat, and realized that Peter was at Hogwarts, in a perfect position to kill you, should the need arise. He decided that he had to escape prison and stop Peter, so he used his unregistered form to get past the dementors, and that’s who he’s really been after all this time. Not you, Peter. He went to Ron’s bed, not yours.”

“Wow,” said Harry, stunned.

“Anyway,” said Lupin. “I watched you two leave Hagrid’s hut with Peter, but then Peter left you almost immediately.”

“He bit me and ran off.”

“You should have Madam Pomfrey check the bite for infections from that rat! Anyway, I then saw on the map Sirius chasing Peter. I ‘mischief managed’ the map and put it in this drawer.” He then opened the drawer and took it out. “Then I walked over to the place they were headed, the Whomping Willow.” He smiled. “When I got in the passageway, I found a rather confused hippogriff, and I left him in the passage and kept on going until I got to the Shrieking Shack, where I found Sirius about to kill Peter. He explained everything to me, and I got Sirius to just capture Peter instead of kill him so Sirius could prove his innocence and we put him in a magical force field that neither a man, nor a rat, could escape. After we had him captured, I realized that I’d forgotten to take the potion, wolfsbane, that Professor Snape has been making me every month since I’ve been teaching here. Sirius then left with Buckbeak, and took him to a forest far away while I transformed into a werewolf and apparently terrorized Peter all night from the other side of his force field. Sirius then apparated back to Hogsmeade, transformed into a dog, and came back to the Shrieking Shack to wait for me to bring him news, so he could find out if he was cleared.”

Lupin continued. "After I changed back, I brought Pettigrew to the castle, where I found that Minister Fudge himself had spent the night after looking for some escaped hippogriff. After hearing Pettigrew confess to everything under the influence of veritaserum, Fudge had him arrested and cleared Sirius Black of all charges, and said something about giving the story to Rita Skeeter of the Daily Prophet to make sure that people wouldn't try to capture Black." Lupin then touched the map and winked at Harry. He then turned around and walked away. Harry, catching the hint, smiled, grabbed the map and stuffed it in his pocket while Hermione turned her head to look the other way. After giving Harry plenty of time, Lupin turned around and said, "Harry, Sirius Black wants to speak to you."

"All right," said Harry, shrugging his shoulders. "Since he was innocent, I guess I can meet him."

"By the way," said Lupin. "If you don't tell anyone about Sirius being an animagus, I won't tell anyone about you freeing Buckbeak." Both children laughed at this.

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A few hours later, Harry found himself back in Lupin's office, alone with his godfather. Sirius Black looked like a man who'd been on the run for a long time. "You really look so much like James, except for your eyes. You have..."

"...my mother's eyes. Yes, I know," said Harry sadly.

Sirius hesitantly put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "It seems cruel that I got to spend so much time with them, and you so little. I know that you're aware that your parent's appointed me your guardian," said Black stiffly. "That if anything happened to them, that I..."

"Do you mean you want me to live with you?" asked Harry.

"I'll understand of course, if you want to stay with your aunt and uncle. And the only home I own is ghastly. We'd have to find another one anyway."

Harry couldn't believe his ears. "I've already decided that I'll never go back to live with them, even if I have to be on my own, so I'll be glad to live with you. My only condition is that we live in Potter Manor."

"You know about Potter Manor?" asked Black, apparently surprised.

"I fixed it up over Easter break and was planning on moving there tomorrow. I do want to keep it a secret from Dumbledore and the Ministry of Magic, though. I don't want anyone to be able to find me. Right now, only Hermione's family knows about it."

Sirius smiled, "It's a deal, as long as I can tell Moony." Harry nodded. "You know, I can't for the life of me remember where that mansion is."

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## Chapter 9 – Leaving Hogwarts

The next morning, Harry woke up very early and snuck down to the common room. He was surprised to hear music softly playing when he got there. “Hello,” he called out, causing the bushy-haired brunette sitting on the other side of the room completely absorbed in the music coming from her cd player to jump.

“Oh Harry,” Hermione said panting from the shock. “It’s you.”

“Yes love,” said Harry while approaching her. “I’m sure you’re disappointed. I know you were hoping I was Ron com...”

“Ew!” shrieked Hermione while lowering the volume of her cd. “Don’t even joke about me liking that prat!” Then she smiled mischievously. “Now that captain of the Hufflepuff team, Cedric Diggory. He’s so handsome, and such a GOOD seeker. All it took for him to beat you was help from a hundred dementors.”

Harry grinned just as mischievously as his girlfriend. “But did you see the seeker for the Ravenclaw team, Cho Chang? She’s so...”

“Ok, ok,” said Hermione. “I guess two can play at that game. I’m sorry.”

Harry chuckled. “Me too. Anyway, I can see, or rather hear, that you got your cd player working here.”

She smiled, “Yeah. I guess I should have told you earlier. I guess that since it gets its power magically, its operation isn’t affected by the magic of this castle, so I’d guess that magical laptops would work here. If only we knew if they were legal or not.”

“Why don’t we write Mr. Weasley? We’ll just say that we found out how to make magic batteries from the book we sent him, and were wondering if using magical batteries and Internet connections that don’t change the behavior of the computers would be illegal. In fact, instead of write him, we can ask him at King’s Cross Station today.”

“All right, Harry,” she said.

“Now, if we can do that, Hermione, I’d like to know if we can put the text of our books onto the computers.”

She beamed at him. “Oh, that would be helpful!” she said excitedly. “We could easily search the text for words, and have only need to bring our laptops with us instead of the books!”

“I still think we should carry the books to classes,” said Harry. “No need to call attention from the teachers. But I think we should get book bags that are magically weightless and bottomless for next year.”

“You don’t have to buy me...” said Hermione.

“I want to, Mine,” said Harry.

“Er, don’t you mean, ‘Mione?’” asked Hermione.

Harry blushed. “I prefer calling you ‘Mine’ if you don’t mind.”

Now she blushed. “Er, well I guess you can call me ‘Mine’ but only you, and ONLY when we’re alone. But now I will have to think up a nickname for you.”

“Well, the prophet calls me the ‘Boy Who Lived’ and Draco calls me ‘Scarhead,’” suggested Harry.

“No. Don’t be silly! None of those names suits you.” She sighed. “I’ll have to think about it and get back to you.”

“Ok Mine, whatever you say. Did you get everyone in the school to sign our petition?” asked Harry. “Or will we have to take it to everyone on the train.”

“I believe we got everyone we wanted,” said Hermione. “One hundred and fifty signatures out of two hundred and twenty-four total. That’s nearly three-fourths of the students.”

“That’s great!” said Harry. “If that doesn’t get Dumbledore’s attention, I don’t know what will.”

“Yeah,” said Hermione distractedly. “I, er, tried talking to Percy about education here.”

“You didn’t tell him about the petition, did you?”

“No, of course not!” said Hermione. “I was just trying to see what he thought, conversationally. You were right, Harry. When I even suggested that a few of our professors aren’t doing a very good job, he about jumped down my throat. He told me that if I didn’t stop badmouthing the school system, he’d have to take house points from me or put me in detention!”

“Well Mine,” chuckled Harry. “I won’t gloat over it. I’m sorry that I was right. I honestly don’t think that Percy has a mind of his own. He’s so full of rules and regulations he can’t see past that badge of his.”

“Did you let the Dursleys know not to pick you up today?” asked Hermione, changing the subject.

Harry smiled, “Actually, I told them to come an hour after the train arrives. After we get back, I’ll rent an owl to send them a letter that says they’ll never see me again. I wouldn’t want to subject Hedwig to them.”

“Of course not,” said Hermione, stopping her cd player. “I don’t know about you, Harry, but I want to have a shower before breakfast, so I’m going back up to my dorm.”

“Good idea. I guess I’ll do the same thing.”

After they’d showered and had breakfast, they quickly found themselves on the train back home. They found an empty compartment, and sat down. Before they could get settled though, Neville approached. “D, Do you mind if I sit here?”

“Of course not Neville,” said Hermione.

"Not as long as you don't mind watching us snog the whole ride," joked Harry, causing Neville to blush while Hermione slapped Harry's arm.

"Neville," said Hermione, "We weren't gonna..."

"It's none of my business," said Neville simply, as he took a seat.

"So," asked Neville, "W, When are you gonna present that petition to P, Professor Dumbledore?"

"After we get our grades, Neville," said Harry. "We figured that Snape would fail everybody who signed the petition if we didn't wait."

Neville smiled. "Good! He gives me a bad enough grade without that factoring in."

"Who gives you a bad grade?" asked a red-head girl who just stuck her head into the compartment.

"Professor S, Snape," said Neville.

"That greasy git!" said Ginny. "I think he just hates everybody who's not in Slytherin! May I join you guys?"

"Sure Ginny," said Harry, causing her ears to turn slightly pink. She was almost completely over her crush, almost.

She sat next to Neville, whose ears inexplicably went pink the moment she sat down.

"We were talking about our petition," said Hermione, filling Ginny in, "and how we're waiting to turn it in until after grades are handed out because we think Snape would give bad grades to everyone involved, no matter how well they performed in class."

"Yeah," said Ginny, "That's a good idea."

"What's a good idea?" asked Ron.

"You finding another compartment," said Ginny, smiling.

"It's all right if you sit with us," said Harry. "Hermione and I want to talk to your father at the station."

"What do you want to talk to dad about?" asked Ginny, obviously curious.

"He won't have the quidditch tickets yet," said Ron. "You're not changing your minds about going are you?"

"No, Ronald," said Hermione. "It's not about quidditch. It's about muggle artifacts law."

"Well, dad's the right one to talk about that with," said Ginny. "He's the head of that department."

"Yes we know," said Hermione. "We want to know if it's illegal to..."

"...to use magical batteries in muggle devices," finished Harry.

"Batteries?" asked Ron. "What are those?"

"They're a type of portable muggle power source that doesn't need plugs," said Ginny proudly. "Don't you ever pay attention to dad going on about muggles, Ron."

"That's right Ginny," said Harry.

She smiled. "Dad's taught me a lot of muggle stuff. I signed up for muggle studies. Of course, that was before you told me how pathetic the teacher is."

"Hopefully we'll be able to force the school to get us better teachers before school starts back," said Hermione.

The ride went by smoothly, and when the trolley came around, Harry treated everyone to whatever sweets they wanted. Harry and Hermione couldn't help but notice the way that Neville and Ginny were glancing at each other every now and then. Whenever their eyes met, both their cheeks would go red and they'd immediately become very interested in their shoes. When the train ride ended, Harry and Hermione followed the youngest Weasleys to their parents,

signaling both the Grangers and Sirius, who appeared to have gotten new clothes and a haircut, to wait a few minutes. When they saw the adult Weasleys, they asked if they could have a private word with Mr. Weasley, to which he heartily agreed.

Once they were out of earshot of everyone else, Mr. Weasley said, "How are you two? I can't thank you enough for that book, by the way, it's very fascinating how the author managed to make magical plugs!" He then looked around, as though expecting someone to be eavesdropping. "I've even been experimenting with that myself."

"That's what we wanted to talk to you about, sir," said Harry.

"We read the book before sending it to you, and we think we could make one of their portable computers run on a magical battery and use a magical connection to the Internet."

"Really," said Mr. Weasley with the expression of a small child on Christmas morning. "A Pomcuter? You really think it would work?"

"Yes, sir," said Hermione. "We tried it with a muggle music player at Hogwarts and it worked."

"Incredible!" said Mr. Weasley.

"Anyway," continued Hermione. "We wanted to know if it would be illegal to do that to a computer and use it both at Hogwarts, and in the muggle world."

"Well," said Mr. Weasley. "That would depend."

"On what, sir?" both Harry and Hermione said together.

"On whether it functions any different than the device would with a proper muggle battery and Interestnet connection. The reason using a flying car would be illegal is because muggle cars don't fly."

"Oh," Hermione sighed. "Apart from the fact that the battery doesn't run out, it will function exactly as a normal computer."

“Then it’s perfectly technically legal,” said Mr. Weasley, “Although I wouldn’t let a muggle get too good of a look at it if I were you.”

“None but maybe my parents,” said Hermione excitedly.

“You’re not planning on doing underage magic are you?” asked Mr. Weasley seriously. “Both of you live with muggles, so it’ll be easy for the ministry to catch you at it.”

“No sir,” they both answered together.

“We were just planning on buying the computers this summer and bringing them to Hogwarts this fall,” said Harry.

“Then we’d perform the charms on them at school,” said Hermione.

“All right then,” said Mr. Weasley. “Was there anything else?”

“No sir,” they both said while shaking their heads.

“Then I’ll get back to my family, and I’ll owl you when I find out about the world cup tickets.”

“Thank you sir,” said Harry.

“Bye then,” said Mr. Weasley.

After he’d gone, the young couple found Hermione’s parents deep in conversation with Sirius Black. As they approached, the adults all turned toward them.

“Ah, Harry, Hermione,” said Adam Granger happily. “How was your trip home?”

“Great,” said Hermione while Harry nodded his accent.

“What were you talking to Mr. Weasley about, dear,” asked Marissa Granger.

“Nothing,” said Hermione. “We were just making sure that charming computers to work without electricity and with a magical Internet connection was legal.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Granger said uneasily.

“Yes,” said Hermione happily. “And it is legal, and my cd player worked at school, so Harry wants to buy us laptops to use next year.”

“That’s great, honey,” said Mr. Granger, “but we’ll be glad to buy you a laptop. The only reason we haven’t before was because you couldn’t use it at Hogwarts.”

“Really?” asked Hermione, hugging her father. “Thank you daddy! I’d like it as soon as possible so that we can set it up and program it with as much information as possible.”

“So,” said Mrs. Granger. “You’re going to teach Harry arithmancy, teach us how to stop people from reading our minds, and set up magical laptops with all the information you can this summer.”

“Yes,” said Hermione. “Although I suppose the laptops can wait until after Harry’s had his test in the middle of July. That reminds me Harry, did you get an arithmancy book or do you need to borrow mine?”

“I picked one up for him earlier today,” said Sirius, revealing a book that he’d been holding at his side.

“Er, how’d you guys meet, anyway?” asked Harry. “I know I didn’t show you any pictures of each other.”

“We saw you wave at Sirius while you guys were walking toward the Weasleys,” said Marissa.

“So we figured that he probably was the man Hermione wrote us about yesterday, and decided to take a chance and introduce ourselves.”

“We’ve been invited to dinner at the Grangers,” said Sirius, smiling. “And I accepted.”

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## Chapter 10 – A New Life

Harry and Hermione were giving Sirius the tour of the Grangers' home and were currently in the garden while Mr. and Mrs. Granger were inside preparing dinner. Sirius said, "It really is nice to walk around as a free man! Even after I escaped, I still couldn't walk around in gardens like this."

"Yes, I suppose not, Mr. Black," said Hermione.

"Call me Sirius, Hermione," said Sirius Black with a smile. Then, looking around he said, "This really is a beautiful garden. I'll bet you had a hand in making it."

She blushed. "I helped a bit."

"So, how long have you two been going out?"

They both smiled. "Since just after Christmas," said Harry. "We've been friends since Halloween of first year, but that's another story."

"I'd love to hear it sometime, but go on with how you started dating," said Sirius.

"What happened at Christmas was that Harry had received a firebolt with no note," said Hermione."

"Oh," said Sirius, his face free of expression.

"Yes," continued Hermione. "And since we'd been told that you were out to kill Harry, I was afraid you'd cursed it and sent it to trick Harry into riding it so he'd fall off it and die."

"Hm," said Sirius.

"Anyway, she turned it over to Professor McGonagall, and Ron Weasley went ballistic, saying she was jealous and other nonsense like that," said Harry.

"But Harry," said Hermione with a smile, "stood up for me and let me explain my fears."

"After that," said Harry, "he wouldn't hang out with us anymore, so we spent a lot more time together, and well..."

"Starting kissing," suggested Sirius with a smile.

Both Harry and Hermione turned beet red. "Er, yeah," said Harry.

"And then Ron caught us and started acting worse toward us." Hermione sighed. "We're back on speaking terms with him, but I don't think our friendship will ever be close again."

Sirius said, "I'm sorry about Ron, but I've got a confession to make."

"What?" asked both teenagers together.

Sirius chuckled, "I did send Harry the broomstick for Christmas."

"So I was at least half right!" said Hermione triumphantly while Harry just stood there dazed for a few seconds.

Harry then smiled. "So in a way, you brought us together!"

They all chuckled a bit at that, but were interrupted when Marissa Granger called out, "Dinner's ready, you three."

"I'll be right there!" said Sirius. "This is my first home-cooked meal in thirteen years!"

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While they were eating, Mr. Granger said to Sirius, "I understand you met Harry yesterday afternoon."

"Yes," he said, "although really it was reacquainted myself with him. I knew him as a baby. He's turned into an outstanding young man."

Harry's ears turned pink. "He has indeed," said Mrs. Granger, causing the pink to spread from Harry's ears to his cheeks.

"I must admit that I'm glad there'll be an adult staying with Harry," said Mr. Granger. "I understood why he had to leave those awful

relatives of his, and I know he can take care of himself, but I planned on checking on him every few days just to make sure he was alright."

"I promised James and Lily I'd look after him, and now I finally can keep that promise," said Sirius.

"So, what did you do after you met Harry?" asked Marissa.

"Well, a few minutes after I left Harry, Dumbledore called me to his office."

"What did he want?" asked Harry, frowning. He could guess what the meeting was about.

"He wanted to talk me out of taking Harry away from the Dursleys."

"What?" asked Adam and Marissa at the same time with horrified expressions on their faces.

"Yeah, even after I told him about how the Dursleys treat Harry! He tried to tell me how Harry's safer there and I lost my temper. I yelled at him about how he should have put Harry anywhere but with those people! There were literally hundreds of families lined up ready to take in the 'Boy Who Lived!' It might not have been good for him to be raised with fame, but it would have been better than the Dursleys!"

"I know that's true!" said Harry, fuming at that thought, which had never occurred to him before.

Before anyone could say anything more, an owl started tapping at the window nearest the dining room. Mrs. Granger got up and let the owl, which was carrying a copy of the evening edition of the Daily Prophet, into the house. It flew straight to Sirius, who relieved it of the paper and gave it a coin.

"What's in the news?" asked Hermione.

"Let me find out," said Sirius, as he unrolled the paper. "What? That imbecile Fudge!"

“What’s happened?” asked Harry, with a worried look on his face that was shared by his girlfriend.

“Pettigrew’s escaped! Some idiot let him loose for a second before putting him in a cell. He transformed into a rat and got away!”

Marissa looked concerned. “Do you think he’ll go after Harry?”

Sirius got a hungry expression on his face. “I hope he does,” he said calmly. “I’m cleared now, so I don’t need to keep that murderer alive, especially since the ministry can’t keep that rat prisoner. But I doubt he’ll do that. He’ll probably just find some other wizarding family to take him in as a pet.” Then Sirius’ face turned grim. “Unless...”

“Unless what?” asked Hermione.

“Unless he tries to find his master,” said Sirius.

Everyone at the table was silent until Harry decided to change the subject. “So Hermione, have you figured out an arithmancy study schedule for me, yet?”

Hermione smiled. “Of course Harry! You’ll have to learn a chapter a day to make sure we have time to test you before Professor Vector does. You’ll need to read chapter one tonight and then again tomorrow before I come over at noon to discuss it and test you, and then we’ll keep doing that with every chapter until we finish chapter twenty. Then I’ll start making up exams for you to take every day until your test.” Harry’s eyes were bulging out more and more as he spoke, but he nodded his head in ascent anyway, knowing that he would need to work hard to get out of divination.

“I don’t think you need to go there every day, dear,” said Hermione’s mum. “Harry, why don’t you come here every other day?”

“Sure,” said Harry.

“Of course it doesn’t matter where we meet at, just as long as meet every day,” said Hermione.

“Then it’s settled,” said Sirius. “I’d also like to invite all of you to dinner at our house tomorrow. I can apparate at about noon to pick Hermione up, and you all can come over at five. I’d also like to see about putting you on the Potter floo network.” Sirius turned to Harry. “I seem to remember something about being able to set up fireplaces that could floo to and from Potter Manor and nowhere else. I’d like to ask that painting, Joseph or Joshua or...”

“Julius?” supplied Harry.

“Yes, Julius Potter, your ancestor from long ago. I guess you’ve met him.”

“Yeah, and I set up my security with him, which reminds me, I’ll have to tell him to allow you in the house.”

“Yes,” said Sirius, “That would be helpful.”

“Adam, Marissa,” said Harry, turning his attention on Hermione’s parents. “How have you been doing with that book Hermione sent you?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Granger. “We’ve read it, and have tried building the walls like the book says, but it’s hard to tell how we’re doing without anyone to test us.”

Hermione then turned to her mother. “Would you like me to test you now, so we know where we stand?”

She looked apprehensive. “I guess we’ll have to have someone test us, and I’d rather it be you.” Her father nodded in agreement.

“Ok,” said Hermione. “Mum, I’ll try you first. Look me in the eyes.” They looked each other in the eyes for about five minutes. Both their faces appeared to concentrate more and more until finally Hermione ended it and spoke. “You did very well mum! I had to do almost a full power assault before I could get through. With more practice, I believe you’ll be able to completely keep me or anyone else out of your mind. Dad, are you ready?” Her father nodded his head, and the same thing happened. He was at the same level as his wife.

When they were done, Sirius said questioningly, “You’re studying occlumency?”

“Yes,” answered Hermione. “Harry and I have already learned both that and Legilimency.”

“That’s a bit surprising at your age, but I didn’t know muggles could learn it.”

“Muggles can learn occlumency, but not legilimency,” said Harry knowledgably. “We found a book on it in the Potter library.”

Sirius and Harry arrived outside of Potter Manor about a half hour after that. Once Harry had told Sirius the address, he was able to apparate them outside the place, and the gate opened immediately for Harry.

“Er, Sirius,” said Harry.

“Yeah pup.”

“Because of the security arrangements, it would probably be best if you stay close to me so that the doors can’t close you out.”

“Ok,” said Sirius, chuckling. “But as soon as we get in there I want you to tell Julius to let me in.”

“Sure thing.”

“You know,” said Sirius, looking around. “I’d forgotten just how beautiful this place is, even when it’s getting dark.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, with a smile on his face, “it really is. I’d love to spend all night exploring the grounds, but unfortunately, I have a lot of reading to do tonight, so if you don’t mind, I’d like to hurry up and set the security so I can get to it.”

“I understand pup,” said Sirius. “You’re trying to learn a year’s worth of material in three weeks. Your mum would really be proud of you for that. She was always a dedicated student.”

Harry smiled, “Like Hermione?”

Sirius chuckled, “Yep, just like Hermione.”

As they approached the door to the mansion, it opened right up, and Harry let Sirius walk in ahead of him.

As he entered in, he saw Dobby appear right in front of Sirius Black and bow to the ground. “What friend of the great Harry Potter does Dobby have the privilege of addressing, sir?”

“Well Dobby,” said Sirius with a grin, “My name is Sirius Black.”

“Sirius Black?” Dobby shrieked, “No, you is the escaped murderer who wants to kill Harry Potter! Dobby will not let you...”

“It’s alright, Dobby,” said Harry, chuckling, “honestly. Sirius Black was innocent! He was cleared of all charges yesterday. Peter Pettigrew was the traitor. He faked his death and framed Sirius, but Sirius caught him and proved his innocence.”

“But, unfortunately Dobby,” said Sirius, “The traitor escaped the ministry today. I want you to keep an eye out for him in case he decides to attack Harry. Pettigrew can turn into a rat, so you need to keep a close eye out.”

“Dobby will protect Harry Potter with his very life!” declared Dobby proudly.

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Sirius. “By the way, I’m going to be living here now as Harry’s guardian.”

“Yes,” said Harry. “He’s my godfather.”

“Tomorrow morning, I think I’ll go to the ministry to fill out the parchmentwork to make it legal,” said Sirius. “For now, I believe Julius’ portrait is in the library.”

They walked straight to the library and right to the painting. Harry noticed Sirius do a double-take as they passed the computer. "Wasn't that muggle machine on the fifth floor?"

"Yes," said Harry, still walking, "but I replaced it with a better one and moved this here. It can still be useful."

"Maybe you can show me how sometime," said Sirius. "Once you've passed your arithmancy test. I'd also like you to consider training as an animagus."

Harry brightened up, "You'd do that?"

"Of course," said Sirius, obviously glad of Harry's reaction.

"Would you train Hermione too if she wants?"

"Naturally. Otherwise we couldn't let her join the Marauders, could we?"

Whatever response Harry had was interrupted by the voice of Julius Potter. "Harry, it's good to see you again!"

"It's good to see you too, Julius. May I introduce you to my godfather, Sir..."

"Sirius Black?" said the portrait with a frightened look on his face. "But I'd heard you..."

"He's been cleared of all charges," said Harry. After a brief explanation about Wormtail's treachery, Harry said, "Now he's going to live here, and I need to change my security settings."

"Naturally," said Julius. "I assume you want the doors to open for him, the floo to allow him through the fireplace, and the wards to allow him to apparate in the living room, which by the way is the only place anyone can apparate in this house. That way, even if someone manages somehow to get through the ward, there's more warning that if he got in your bedroom while you were sleeping."

"Yes," said Harry importantly, "Allow him full clearance."

“What about Moony?” asked Sirius. “I’d like him to be able to visit freely.”

Harry said, “Alright. Should I give him full clearance?”

“Yes,” said Sirius, “On second thought, no. Let him floo or apparate. If he comes to the door, we should be able to answer it for him.”

“Ok,” said Harry. “Any particular reason why?”

“Well,” said Sirius, “I’m not sure how the security system would perceive the werewolf if he ever got loose. I know the werewolf can’t apparate or floo, but what if he ran into the house?”

“Well,” said Harry, “I guess you’ve got a point. Julius, give Remus Lupin floo and apparition clearance.”

“Done,” said the portrait. “Anything else?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “Sirius mentioned something to me about being able to set a fireplace that could only floo here and back, that wouldn’t be part of the regular floo network.”

“Yes,” said Julius. “May I assume you would like to do that at Miss Granger’s house?”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“All you’ll have to do, no, Sirius will have to do it because of the age restrictions. Sirius, while holding Harry’s hand, point your wand at their fireplace and say, “Granger Residence Flooious Potterous Manorous Diagon Lily. Their fireplace will glow green for a few seconds if it works. Then it will work as a normal floo, except only to this house. To come here, they’ll say, ‘Diagon Lily’ which by the way Sirius is the new password. To leave from here, they’ll say, ‘Granger Residence.’ You may want to bring them a supply of floo powder. I believe that James and Lily kept an ample supply in a cabinet near the fireplace.”

“Thank you very much, Julius,” said Harry. “I believe that’s all for now. I have a book I need to memorize. I’ll see you later.”

“Hopefully sooner than later,” said Julius.

As Harry and Sirius were walking out of the library, Sirius said, “I’ll find that extra floo powder, and tomorrow we’ll go to the Grangers’ house together to set up their fireplace.

“All right,” said Harry. “For now, I’ll be reading in my room.”

Sirius found about a year’s supply of floo powder in one of the cabinets, so he set aside one container to bring to the Grangers when he Harry would apparate there the next day. When Harry woke up the next morning and went down to breakfast, Sirius was nowhere to be found. Dobby popped into the dining room and said, “Is the great Harry Potter ready for breakfast?”

“Er, yes Dobby, that sounds good,” he said. Dobby snapped his fingers, and a plate filled with pancakes, sausages, bacon, and eggs appeared in front of him, along with silverware and a glass of pumpkin juice. “Wow, that’s great,” said Harry, who didn’t believe he’d ever get used to being served like this at home.

“Dobby is pleased to serve, sir.”

“Dobby,” said Harry, “Do you know where Sirius is?”

“Of course sir, Sirius is giving Dobby a message for Master Harry. Sirius is going to the ministry of magic to apply to be Harry Potter’s legal guardian.”

“Of course,” said Harry, putting his hand on his forehead. “He mentioned that this morning. I might as well eat breakfast and reread chapter one.”

At about 11:30, Harry was just finishing the last page of chapter one when he heard Sirius’ voice downstairs calling his name “I’ll be down there in a few minutes,” he called as he read the last paragraph.”

Five minutes later, he walked down the stairs to see Sirius sitting on a couch with a smile on his face, holding a piece of paper in his hand. “Hi Sirius,” Harry said to his godfather. “How’d it go?”

“It went great,” said Sirius. “There’s just a few formalities that have to be done. I need the Dursleys to fill out this form, relinquishing their guardianship...”

“They should be happy to do that,” said Harry.

“And then they’ll arrange a court date where you have to appear and say you want me to be your guardian.”

“Ok. When do we see the Dursleys?”

“I was hoping to do that tonight after dinner. Do you think we should call first?”

“If we did, they’d make sure they’re not there. I say we just apparate outside their house and knock on the door,” Harry said with a smile.

Sirius grinned back. “Unannounced it is. For now though, it’s time to pick up Hermione.” He grabbed the floo powder, and then Harry’s hand. Together, they disappeared with a pop.

They reappeared in the Grangers’ back yard (that had a privacy fence) and knocked at the back door.

“Harry,” said Hermione with a smile on her face as she hugged him. “What are you doing here? I thought just Sirius was coming.”

“Well I was,” said Sirius, “but we found out how to put your fireplace on the Potter Manor floo network, and Harry had to be here to help.”

“Really?” asked Hermione excitedly. “I know you mentioned the Potter Floo Network, but muggle houses aren’t allowed on the floo network.”

“Yeah really,” said Harry. “You won’t be on the regular floo network. You guys will only be able to floo to my house and back.” Then Harry looked thoughtful for a moment, and then smiled. “Actually, I guess

you could floo from here to my house, and then from my house to anywhere else.”

“So may we come in?” asked Sirius.

“Of course! My parents are at work right now. I’ll call them when we get to your house so they don’t drive all the way to your house for dinner!”

They performed the spell on the Grangers’ fireplace exactly as they were told, and it glowed green while Hermione squealed with joy, much to Harry and Sirius’ amusement. Hermione and then Harry flooed to Potter Manor (using the password, ‘Diagon Lily’) and Sirius apparated. Hermione immediately raced to the fifth floor to use the telephone. When she came back downstairs she said, “My parents are a bit nervous about flooing, so they asked me to floo back home when it’s about time for dinner, and then show them how it’s done.”

Harry chuckled, “At least they can’t accidentally end up somewhere else.”

“Anyway,” said Hermione. “I think it’s about time we started talking about arithmancy.”

Hermione was pleased at how much Harry had remembered, to which he responded, “What do you expect after reading the chapter twice within twenty-four hours.”

“That’s the point, Harry,” she said.

Harry said, “I know, Mine,” and then stole a quick kiss.

After she was sure he knew the material, she said, “You’ve done a great job studying chapter one. How do you want to spend the rest of the afternoon?” she said suggestively

He smiled shyly. “I think we can think of something, Mine.” He then pressed his lips to hers.

A few hours later, Hermione flooed out of the manor to meet her parents, and Dobby started preparing for dinner. Before long Mr. and

Mrs. Granger fell to the floor of the living room after arriving in the fireplace. They were quickly followed by Hermione, who smirked at her parents.

After a pleasant dinner, the Grangers all left via the fireplace, and it was time for Harry and Sirius to visit the Dursleys.

They apparated to an empty alley, and walked from there. When they arrived at number four Privit Drive, Sirius Black knocked on the door at 7:55 p.m.

The door opened, revealing Vernon Dursley in all his bulk. Upon seeing Harry, his face began turning purple.

“DON’T. TELL. ME. YOU’RE. LEAVING. THAT. FREAK. HERE. AGAIN?” he yelled, forgetting about what his neighbors thought.

“No,” said Sirius calmly. “I’d never leave Harry with you again. We simply need you to fill out a form relinquishing your custody of Harry to me.”

Vernon calmed down a bit. His face was now pink instead of purple. “Well then, in that case, you can come in, but just long enough for me to fill out your bloody form.”

They walked inside the house, and Harry could hear Petunia gasp while Dudley asked, “What’s HE doing here?”

“We’ll go to the kitchen table so we can lean on it,” said Vernon coldly. “Does Petunia need to sign the bloody form as well?”

“Yes,” said Sirius, equally coldly. “By the way, did Harry leave anything of his here when he left last year?”

“There’s a box in the cupboard,” said Petunia, who had joined them when she was mentioned. Harry walked away to retrieve the box. “What’s going on, Vernon?”

“Just a bloody form to fill out to get rid of the freak for good,” said Vernon.

“For good?” asked Petunia, while Vernon began filling out the form.

“Yes, for good,” hissed Sirius. “He’ll never be subjected to your abuse and neglect again.”

“I’ll be right back,” said Petunia, leaving the kitchen.

Harry came back into the kitchen carrying a small box. “This is all the rest of my stuff.”

“That looks like it’s done,” said Vernon Dursley, ignoring Harry, “All that’s needed is for Petunia to sign it.” He then turned to Sirius. “It will be valid in the normal world, won’t it? I don’t want the police coming around asking about this freak!”

“Don’t worry Dursley,” hissed Sirius, “No one will ever look for Harry here again!”

At that moment Petunia entered the kitchen, carrying a box even smaller than the one Harry was already holding. It looked like an old shoebox. She turned to Harry and said, “This belonged to Lily. I think you should have it,” and put the box into to one Harry was already holding. Then she turned to her husband. “Vernon, where do I sign?”

She quickly signed the form, then Harry and Sirius left. When they got back to the manor, Sirius said, “Well, that went better than I thought. I’ll turn in the form first thing tomorrow and they’ll schedule us a court date. Are you gonna look through your stuff?”

Harry sighed, “I don’t have time for that right now. I’ve got to study arithmancy. I’ll put it in my room and look through it after I’ve taken my test. Goodnight Sirius.”

A week later, Harry was in the Potter library being tested by Hermione on chapter seven of the arithmancy book at Potter Manor. Their court date was set for July 17th at 10 a.m. Harry was getting tired of his study schedule, but was determined to pass his arithmancy test. He found that it wasn’t nearly as hard as it looked, and Hermione was a very patient tutor, answering any questions he had. He had just correctly answered the last question from the end of the chapter when two owls from Hogwarts flew in through an open

window that had been charmed to stop anything but owls from getting through. One went to Hermione while the other went to Harry. They both took the packages off of the owls. Hermione's owl flew away, while Harry's seemed to be waiting for something. Harry opened his envelope and pulled out two pieces of parchment. The first one was his grades, which he temporarily put to the side. The other was a letter from McGonagall. It said,

"Dear Mr. Potter,

Professor Vector has agreed to give you the arithmancy placement test at Hogwarts on July 16th at two o'clock. Will that be acceptable to you? Please send a response to me with this owl.

Sincerely,

Professor McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

P.S. Congratulations on your grades. You were second in your class, only behind Miss Granger."

He then immediately looked at his grades, where he had received 'Outstandings' in Defense Against the Dark Arts, Care of Magical Creatures, Transfiguration, Charms, History of Magic (Hermione taught him that), Astronomy, and Herbology. He surprisingly received "Exceeds Expectations" in Divination (he figured that surviving exceeded Trelawney's expectations, besides, he'd been right in his 'prophesy' about Buckbeak, and that had to count for something). He received an "Acceptable" in Potions, which was actually the best grade he'd ever gotten in that course. He switched grades with Hermione to find that she had "Outstandings" in everything except potions. She got an "Exceeds Expectations" in potions. She pleasantly said, "Probably because I'm dating you!" when Harry commented on it.

"I'd say it's time to send our petition to Professor Dumbledore," said Harry.

“Absolutely!” said Hermione, and they got their petition from Harry’s room, tied it to Hedwig’s leg, and sent her to fly it to Professor Dumbledore.

## Chapter 11 – Petitions, Trial, and Tests

Time passed very swiftly after they received their grades. About a week after they sent the petition, he'd gotten a letter from Dumbledore requesting a meeting immediately following his arithmancy test. Harry kept up with his study schedule, and Hermione was very pleased with how well he was doing. She informed him that her parents had both fully mastered occlumency the day before Harry's test when he'd completed Hermione's practice test with a perfect score. Later that day, Hermione finally decided on Harry's nickname. She'd been telling Sirius all about Harry's exploits over his first few years of Hogwarts, much to Harry's discomfort. After she'd talked about the Chamber of Secrets, Sirius said, "Wow Harry, you are a regular hero!"

After Sirius had left for a few minutes, Hermione turned to Harry. "Hero. That is the perfect nickname for you."

"No," said Harry, whose ears were turning pink. "I'm just not..."

"You made up whatever nickname you wanted, so I get to do the same, Hero," she said, and then stuck out her tongue."

"Fine, Mine," said Harry. "But remember, you can only use that name when we're alone."

"Like now, Hero."

Harry grinned, "On the seventh Sunday of every month."

"Whatever, Hero. I know you're going to get a perfect score on the test tomorrow."

Harry sighed. "I hope I'll pass, anyway."

"You'll do more than pass, Harry. And I'm going with you to Hogwarts to cheer you on."

Harry winked. "I think you just want to crash my meeting with Dumbledore."

Hermione turned a bit pink. "I'm coming to support you taking the test," she said firmly. "But I did hope to help you in your meeting afterward, but if you don't want..."

"Of course I want you there, Mine!" said Harry. "You can stop me from losing my temper if Dumbledore aggravates me. Besides, you know a lot more stuff to use to win an argument."

"You did just fine in your last argument, Hero. But I'll certainly help if I can."

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Before he knew it, Harry found himself in the Great Hall at Hogwarts with Sirius and Hermione, about a half hour early for his test.

"Don't be nervous," said his girlfriend. "You know that information backward and forward."

"I not, Hold on. Look over there."

Hermione turned where he was pointing, and saw a familiar red-haired girl standing with her red-haired mother. "Let's go and say hello," said Hermione, grabbing Harry's hand.

"Hello Mrs. Weasley, Ginny," said Harry when they got to them.

"Oh, Hello Harry dear, Hermione," said Mrs. Weasley.

"Hi guys," said Ginny.

"And who is this gentleman with you?" asked Molly Weasley.

"I'm Harry's godfather, Sirius Black," Sirius said, extending his hand to shake Molly's.

"S-Sirius Black?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm sure you've read in the Daily Prophet that I was cleared of all charges once it came out that Peter Pettigrew framed me."

“Y-Yes, I read that. I’m sorry,” she said. “I was just a bit startled to see you.” She finally took Sirius’ hand and shook it. “I’m Molly Weasley and this is my daughter Ginny.”

“Weasley? Aren’t you the family that was kind enough to offer taking Harry and Hermione to the World Cup?”

“Yes we were. My husband is working on getting the tickets.”

“If you don’t mind, could you ask him to get one for me too. I’d be glad to pay for it, and Harry’s too if you like. I should be his legal guardian by then.”

“His guardian? You’re adopting Harry? What about those muggles, the Dursleys?”

“They never cared about him. They filled out the form to relinquish their rights. Tomorrow at 10, we’ve got the court date, but that’s just a formality.”

“What brings you here?” asked Hermione.

“Some wonderful news!” said Mrs. Weasley. “Ginny here was the best in her year, and is going to skip a year, so she’ll be in class with you two.”

Ginny’s ears turned pink. “Only if I pass these tests.”

“Of course you’ll pass dear,” said Mrs. Weasley. “She’s been studying Ron’s books all summer. She’s been taking placement tests for her classes all day. She’s done well in all of them so far. She just has a few more to take.”

“I’m sure you’ll do great, Ginny,” said Harry, causing the redhead’s face to turn pink.

“Congratulations Ginny!” said Sirius.

“Yeah,” said Hermione. “I’m sure you’re looking forward to having classes with Ron.”

This statement caused Mrs. Weasley to turn pale and look at the ground while Ginny slightly smiled. "Actually," Ginny said, "Ron didn't do so well in his classes, so, er, he has to repeat them."

"It's a disgrace!" said Mrs. Weasley. "I don't know where we went wrong. Bill, Charlie, and Percy did well in school. Ginny's doing even better than them. But Fred, George, and now Ron, just don't take their education seriously! Maybe this will get Ron to start studying."

"What about Fred and George?" asked Harry, curious. He hoped they hadn't failed.

"They hardly got any O.W.L.s," said Ginny. "They're just lucky mum had already gotten the news about Ron, or she would've yelled at them a lot worse. Now they can say that at least they always passed their classes. By the way, why are you here?"

"I, er want to get out of divination, so I'm taking a placement test for arithmancy. If I pass, I'll never have to look at another crystal ball again."

"That's the next test I'm taking," said Ginny. "I really had to study hard for this class."

"Harry's been studying all summer, too," said Hermione.

"Hermione's been tutoring me," said Harry. "She's really good at it too."

Hermione blushed. "He's been a really good student."

"Of course," said Ginny. "I'm sure he enjoys your, uh, lessons," she said suggestively, causing both Harry and Hermione to blush while Sirius chuckled.

"Now Ginny," said Mrs. Weasley. "You're embarrassing them. I'm sure that Hermione is a very good tutor, and if you have any good sense at all Ginny, you'll ask her to help you study."

"We'd be glad to study with Ginny if she wants," said Hermione immediately.

"There you see," said Mrs. Weasley. You should be thankful you already have friends that'll be in your new grade."

"I am mother, and I would like to study with you, and I promise not to glare at you two like Ron. But please don't turn our study sessions into your snogging sessions." Harry, Hermione, and Mrs. Weasley all blushed at that while Sirius laughed. "Unless of course I have a snogging partner too."

"Ginevra Molly Weasley!" shouted her mother. "Just because you're in a class with older students doesn't mean you're old enough for that!"

Whatever reply Ginny had to this was interrupted by the announcement that the arithmancy test was about to begin. After everyone wished both Ginny and Harry good luck, they left to take their test. While those two were taking their test, Molly, Hermione, and Sirius chatted. When Hermione asked where Ron was, Mrs. Weasley said, "He's home pouting. If that boy studied as much as he pouts, he'd have been promoted to seventh year by now!" causing the others to have a good laugh at Ron's expense.

About two hours after they'd left, a very exhausted but happy looking Ginny and Harry approached the others. "How'd you do," asked Hermione, Sirius, and Molly at the same time.

"We both got the same score," said Harry, chuckling.

"Ninety-five percent," added Ginny.

"That's wonderful!" squealed Hermione as she threw her arms around Harry.

"Congrats, pup," said Sirius, slapping Harry on the back. "You too, Ginny."

"Thanks," said the redhead girl as her mother released her from a bone-crushing embrace.

"Well," said Harry. "We've got to go now. We've got to talk to Professor Dumbledore about something."

“Is this about...” asked Ginny.

“Yes,” said Hermione.

“Well, good luck,” said Ginny.

“You too,” said Harry, Sirius, and Hermione together as they walked toward Professor Dumbledore’s office.

“Enter,” said the aged professor when he heard a knock at the door. He was surprised to see that Harry wasn’t alone. “Hello Harry, Hermione, Sirius. It’s good to see you. How have you been this summer?”

“Fine, sir,” said Harry.

“I assume you all know what this meeting is about,” asked Dumbledore.

“The petition we sent you,” said Hermione.

“I must admit I was surprised to see your signature on the petition, Miss Granger. According to our records, you haven’t had trouble in any of your classes, although your potions grade did slip a bit.”

“That git lowered my grade only because I’m dating Harry, the boy he’s absolutely hated for no reason since he set foot in the school!” Hermione burst out, surprising everyone in the room.

“Professor Snape...”

“He’s not worthy of that title, sir,” said Hermione calmly. “He conducts himself in a completely unprofessional way, as is outlined in our petition, which the vast majority of students has signed.”

Dumbledore sighed. “Both Professor Snape and Professor Trelawney, although she doesn’t know it, require my protection in relationship to Voldemort and his followers.”

The three guests gasped. Harry recovered first. “Just because they need protection does not make them good teachers. You have been subjecting students to a poor level of education in those subjects for over a decade just because those people require protection.”

“They wouldn’t feel good about themselves if they were doing nothing,” argued Dumbledore, now going pink.

“Feel good about themselves!” said Hermione furiously. “Every year Trelawney has repeatedly told one of her students that he or she is going to die! Snape tries to make every student who’s not in Slytherin feel worthless and stupid! Not only has he picked on Harry from day one, but he has poor Neville so scared of him, that his boggart takes on Snape’s form! Don’t you even care about the students here?”

Dumbledore’s face went red. “Of course I care about the students here! They always come first!”

“Then why do you keep a history of magic teacher who does nothing but bore the class to sleep? The only way anybody learns that subject is by reading the book!” said Harry

“Or a muggle studies professor who knows nothing about muggles,” said Hermione. “Anyone who teaches that class should be muggle-raised! Harry or I could teach that class better than the professor! The sad part is that most people who do well in that class actually believe they know about muggles.”

“The quality of education at Hogwarts is at an all time low, Professor Dumbledore,” said Sirius, speaking for the first time since entering the office. “And these children, along with everyone who signed that petition, are demanding that you as headmaster do something about it.”

“I can’t just sack four teachers at the same time,” said Dumbledore, frustrated. “Do you know how difficult it is to replace them?”

“I thought the students always came first,” said Harry, “or is that just when it’s convenient?”

Dumbledore put his head down. “I can’t...”

"If you don't, we'll send a copy of the petition to every school governor," said Hermione. "If that doesn't work, we'll send it to the ministry itself. Of course, you know what they'll probably do when they get the petition. Just sack the headmaster and hire someone who cares about the quality of education at Hogwarts."

Harry added, "You'd deserve it too, headmaster."

Dumbledore sighed. "I'll see what I can do."

"No," said Sirius. "You're the headmaster. You can sack them all today! Unless you can prove that they actually are good teachers, contrary to the opinion of the vast majority of their students, that's what you have to do if you want to keep your job."

"You can't threaten me!" said Dumbledore, glaring at Black.

"I'm not threatening you. I'm just telling you what you know will happen." Then Sirius smiled at his former headmaster. "Wouldn't you feel better about yourself if you knew you were giving your students the best possible education the way you used to?"

Dumbledore sighed, defeated. "Yes, I would feel better. I've been wrestling with my conscience since I hired Professors Snape and Trelawney, telling myself it's for the greater good. But the greater good truly is the student's education. As for the other two, I simply haven't had the heart to sack them, but you're right. I've been doing a lot more harm than good. I intend to follow your advice about muggle studies, Miss Granger. I'll try to find someone muggle-raised. Perhaps even a muggle who's aware of us. Someone like your parents, Miss Granger, although as I understand it, they're perfectly content in their careers. Maybe even a squib who lives as a muggle." Professor Dumbledore scratched his chin. He mumbled something like, "...since he's not living there she doesn't need..." and then he said with a grandfatherly smile. "That reminds me, Mr. Potter, for school records; where exactly are you and Sirius living now."

Harry contemplated his answer. He could lie about it, but what would be the point? He assumed Dumbledore would know Sirius was aware of Potter Manor. Besides, knowing the name of the place didn't give away its location. "Potter Manor."

Dumbledore's eyes went wide. "Potter Manor, all right. Could you refresh an old man's memory? What is its address?"

Harry smiled. "I do not wish to allow any records of Potter Manor's location to exist."

"I quite understand, my boy. Especially considering your past..."

While Dumbledore was speaking, Harry felt the familiar tingling sensation of legilimency. His shields went up immediately, causing Dumbledore to flinch. Harry stood up angrily. "What the hell do you think you're doing probing my mind!" he shouted.

"Harry?" asked Dumbledore. "You know occlumency?"

"Yes!" shouted the still angry teenager. "I learned it because Snape was reading my mind! I never thought you were low enough to do it too! Just how many times have you read my mind, sir? What about the other students?"

"I apologize for the invasion of privacy," said Dumbledore, facing angry glares from the three people in front of him. "I merely wanted to put up extra wards to protect it."

"More likely to spy on me."

"Professor," said Hermione. "Potter Manor is extremely well protected, but if there are specific wards you feel should be there, tell us what they are. We'll learn how to do put them up."

"Never mind," said the Professor. "You're dismissed."

"All right," said Harry as he was getting up. "We'll be watching the Daily Prophet for news about those teachers. If they're not sacked within a week, we'll do what we said."

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The next day at 9:45, Harry found himself standing in the visitor center of the Ministry of Magic headquarters. Sirius had apparated there, bringing Harry with him. After they had checked their wands in,

a process that Harry found disturbing, they were directed to the elevator, where they ran into Mr. Weasley. "Hello Mr. Weasley," Harry said upon spotting him inside the elevator.

"Oh, hello Harry!" he said, shaking Harry's hand enthusiastically, "How are you?"

"I'm fine. This is..."

"Sirius Black I presume," Arthur said, shaking Sirius' hand. When Sirius nodded, Arthur said, "Molly told me about meeting you yesterday. She also said you were petitioning for custody of Harry today."

"That's right," said Sirius.

"I'm sure you'll have no problem with that now that your name's cleared," he said. "Molly also said you'd like to see the World Cup with us."

Sirius smiled, "Yes, if it's not intruding."

"Not at all," said Mr. Weasley enthusiastically. "But never mind about the cost. If I can get them, they'll be free. You may want to bring some galleons with you for souvenirs, though."

"I will," said Sirius.

"Well," said Arthur, this is where I get off. Nice seeing you again, Harry, and good meeting you, Sirius."

When they got to their destination, they found that it was a very small room with a desk in the center and a few dozen chairs in the back. The five people in those chairs, who had obviously already witnessed other proceedings in that courtroom today, appeared very bored. However, when they noticed Harry's scar, they immediately began paying close attention.

The judge, a middle-aged woman with long blonde hair that she wore in a pony tail, was already seated at the desk. She was wearing black ministry robes, and Harry noticed her eyes glance at his famous scar

for just a moment when they entered before she spoke. "We now begin the case of Sirius Black's request for custody of Harry Potter to be taken from Vernon and Petunia Dursley and given to him. Everyone who is at these proceedings is required to tell the truth. Failure to do so will result in time in Azkaban. This will be an informal hearing. We have the form that the Dursleys, Harry's current guardians, filled out relinquishing their claims on Mr. Potter. Sirius Black, according to our records, as well as the form you submitted, you were one of the Potter's closest friends, and they asked you to be Harry's godfather. Soon after their deaths, you were falsely accused of betraying them, and were sent to Azkaban. You were recently cleared of all former charges, and now wish to accept your responsibility as Harry's godfather. Is this correct?"

"Yes ma'am."

"It also indicates that you have ample resources to care for yourself and Mr. Potter."

"That's also correct."

"Well then, since everything seems to be in order, I just have a few questions for Harry Potter."

"Yes, your honor," said Harry.

"How well do you know Sirius Black?"

"I'd say I know him pretty well. I've been living with him for about a month."

"Do you like living with Sirius Black?"

"Yes."

"Do you want Sirius Black to be your guardian?"

"Yes."

"Then unless anybody here has any objections, I hereby grant legal custody of Harry James Potter to Sirius Black. This hearing is adjourned."

Sirius hugged Harry excitedly, and they left the ministry, stopping by Arthur's office to tell him the good news. When they apparated back to Potter Manor, they found Hermione already waiting there for the news. "Well," she said expectantly.

Sirius glanced at Harry and winked. They both put on sad expressions. Harry said, "The judge mentioned about Sirius spending time in Azkaban."

"She also talked about the Dursleys," said Sirius.

Hermione looked horrified, "She didn't tell you to move back in with them?"

Harry couldn't keep up the charade. With a big smile on his face he said, "No, she granted Sirius custody! I'm free of the Dursleys forever!"

Hermione slapped Harry in the back of the head. "Ouch!" he said. "What was that for?"

"For making me think Sirius didn't get custody." Then her face brightened up and she pulled him into a big hug. "I'm so happy for you! I can't wait to tell my parents when they get back from work! We've got to celebrate! Why don't we use that pavilion of yours and have a picnic? It's a beautiful day!"

"Maybe we can go swimming in my pool too!" said Harry. "Now that I've passed my test I have some time to enjoy myself."

"Ok, I'll have to get my swimsuit. I'll be right back!"

After having Dobby make them a picnic lunch, Harry and Sirius went to their rooms (Sirius insisted that Harry had the master bedroom and he had the one next to it that had the TV) to change into swimwear and came downstairs. They waited five minutes for Hermione to flop back in her swimsuit that Sirius taunted Harry about liking too much.

They went swimming before eating. Sirius conjured a beach ball and a net in the pool, then Harry played Hermione a game of water-volleyball, while Sirius acted as judge to make sure neither cheated with summoning or repelling charms.

When they were finished, they found that Dobby had laid out beach towels for them. After they'd dried out some, they sat under the pavilion and ate lunch. While they were eating, Sirius said, "What do you say tomorrow I take you shopping for those muggle portable computers you want?"

"That sounds perfect!" said Harry.

"I'll just have to tell my parents and find out how much they'll let me spend on mine," said Hermione.

"Harry, did you tell her about what I wanted to teach you guys?"

"Tell me what?" asked Hermione.

"Not yet, Sirius. I was rather busy."

"Tell me what?" asked Hermione again.

"I'd like to start teaching you guys to become animagi," said Sirius.

Hermione's eyes widened. She excitedly said, "Harry, why didn't you tell me sooner? This should be exciting! But what if I don't have a form? How long will it take?"

"Hermione," said Harry, "calm down. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner; I was concentrating on arithmancy, which you helped me with tremendously. As for the other questions, you'll have to ask Sirius."

"Well, Hermione," said Sirius, "It is exciting, but it does take time. Tomorrow I'm gonna give you both a copy of a book I want you to read within the next week, and then we'll talk about it. I'd be very surprised if you don't have an animal form. I'd estimate that we'll find that out by Christmas, and that within a year from now you should both be able to transform."

“Why so long?” asked Harry.

“Well, for one thing,” said Sirius, “You’ll have to take a potion that takes four months to brew. I’ve started it already, but it won’t be ready before you go back to school, so you’ll take the potion during your Christmas break. After that you’ll start the slow process of learning to transform.” He then smiled. “You’ll have to sneak around Hogwarts to do it. Just remember if you’re caught to simply pretend you were snogging.” He then winked while Harry and Hermione blushed. “Speaking of which, I think I’ll be headed back into the house. I’ll leave you two out here to, er, talk. You may want to take a walk around the grounds.” He then got up and left.

After spending a few hours with Hermione, kissing, talking about nothing, kissing, walking around the grounds, and kissing, Harry walked into his bedroom to do something he’d wanted to do since he’d last seen the Dursleys. He picked up the box Petunia had given him, that used to belong to his mother, and opened it.

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 12 – What's in the Box?

When Harry looked into the box his mother gave him, he noticed some pieces of jewelry on top of some papers. He gently placed the jewelry on his bed, decided to look through the papers first. The first piece of paper he found was a piece of muggle notebook paper that had been folded neatly in thirds. He unfolded it to see it was a letter written in green ink, and upon glancing at the bottom, he saw for the first time in his life, his mother's signature. Harry read his letter

*My dearest Harry,*

*If you are reading this letter, then it means that both your father and I have died, but somehow you've survived. I left this box with your Aunt Petunia because I don't think Voldemort will attack her. I've instructed her to give this to you and Sirius immediately if we die. The first thing I want to say is that we both love you more than we ever thought possible, and that if our deaths have somehow allowed you to survive, then we haven't died in vain. You matter more to us than anything, and our only regret is that we weren't around to watch you grow into a man.*

*We went into hiding to try to protect you from Voldemort. He has targeted you because of a prophecy that was given to Professor Dumbledore. If you don't know about it yet, demand that he show you the memory in his pensieve immediately! His heart is in the right place, but he has a habit of withholding information when he believes it is 'for the greater good.' I can't risk writing it down here, but it is extremely important that you know about it as soon as possible so that you can prepare! We've told everyone that Sirius Black is our secret-keeper, but that's not true. In actuality, Peter Pettigrew is our secret-keeper, and if we are dead, it may be that he has betrayed us. If that happened, then everyone may think Sirius was the traitor. If they arrest him, the truth should come out in his trial when they question him under veritaserum, but if the truth hasn't come out, then tell the authorities about this immediately! Sirius Black is a good man, and shouldn't have to pay for another's crime.*

*We hope that Sirius Black has survived, stayed out of prison, and raised you. If he has, then I'm sure he's already told you about us. I just want to make sure you know what your father was like from my point of view. When I first met him, I thought he was an arrogant git that half the girls at Hogwarts wanted to date for reasons that I couldn't fathom. He always was handsome, and even as a baby, you appear to have inherited that trait. I eventually came to know him as a good-hearted man who simply enjoyed pulling pranks on the deserving, usually Slytherins. I used to try to defend his and his friends, "The Marauders," victims until one day he was picking on a Slytherin by the name of Snape. After I defended him, he had the nerve to call me a mudblood. I didn't admit it at the time, but at that moment, I realized that the bigot had it coming. Snape eventually became a Death Eater, although rumor has it, he's working for Professor Dumbledore now. I wonder what the Headmaster's playing at. Anyway, after that incident, I came to realize that the Marauders actually were bringing justice to people that society was unwilling to punish. When people at school get into a fight, both parties are punished, no matter what it was about. People like Snape who strut around full of themselves insulting others who are only trying to help them deserve to have someone demonstrate that they're not as great as they think. I'll never admit it to your father, but I hope you do the same thing to people like them. After I realized what they were doing, I was more open to his flirting with me, and eventually went out with him. We fell in love, got married, and along came you. James loves you and I more than anything, and he would duel Voldemort himself for either of us.*

*I, on the other hand, have been more or less a bookworm. More than once I've been called an insufferable know-it-all. I've been accused of memorizing the entire Hogwarts library, but it's not true. There were many books in the restricted section that I didn't have time to read. At least a dozen. What can I say, I think knowledge is very useful, and I love learning. I hope that you inherit that trait, at least partially. Your father says I'm pretty. There are photos of me, as well as your father and our friends at the bottom of this box, so you can decide for yourself whether I'm pretty.*

*Now I'll tell you about the contents of this box. This box contains a few self-explanatory documents, such as our marriage license and*

*your birth certificate. As I mentioned, I've left a photo album with every picture labeled in it. I hope that you've had the opportunity to meet most of the people in those photographs. Also enclosed are your father and my wedding bands. They are connected by a charm that works this way. If someone rubs the jewel of one of them, the other will heat up (not enough to burn you, only to alert you) and the person wearing it will know where the other is located, and will even be able to apparate directly to that location (provided they know how to apparate). If wards are blocking the exact location, then the person will apparate just outside of the wards. The rings will work whether worn on any finger or on a chain around the neck, so you don't have to wait until you're married to protect and be protected by someone special. The important think is that it has to be touching skin to work, so it can't be in a pocket. My engagement ring is also included, but alas, it has no charms on it, except for its beauty. There are also two necklaces enclosed. One is gold and has a locket in the shape of a lion. It contains a photo of your father and I on one side, and a photo of you as a newborn on the other side. Your father used to wear it under his shirt to keep his family near his heart. The other necklace is silver, and is the shape of a stag. Your father gave it to me while we were dating. It's charmed so that it works as a shield against most minor hexes. It weakens some stronger hexes as well. I still think that the best block is not to be there, but a little extra protection never hurts. As a muggleborn bookwork who got the best grades in school, I was often the target of pranks by bigots, and when I started dating James Potter, their pranks only increased. Most of the time I was able to defend myself against those idiots who thought that they were automatically more powerful than me simply because of who their parents were. They didn't realize that studying and practicing hexes helps one to be very formidable, and allows one the pleasure of humiliating pureblood bigots.*

*Please take your studying seriously, but don't forget to enjoy yourself. Although I'll never understand his obsession over the game, but your father greatly enjoyed quidditch. Maybe you will too. I don't know how old you'll be when you read this letter, but I hope that one day you'll meet a nice girl (whether muggle or witch) that loves you as much as I love your father. I also hope that one day you'll know the joy of fatherhood, and understand how much James and I care for you.*

*I guess I've rambled on and on, but that's my privilege as your mother. There isn't enough space on this paper or enough words in this language to tell you how much your father and I love you, and I hope you love us too. I don't know what comes after death, but if it's possible, we'll be watching over you.*

*I will love you forever. Never forget that.*

*Your mum,*

*Lily Potter*

By the time Harry finished the letter, tears were freely flowing down his cheeks. He hugged the letter to his chest as he whispered, "I love you too, mum." He sat in his bed thinking about all that the letter had said. He realized that his mother must have been a lot like Hermione. He wished he could have seen his father pull a good prank on Snape. He then considered that Snape had called his mum a mudblood, which gave him one more reason to add to the list of why he hated Snape. He angrily realized that if the Dursleys had given the box to him earlier, Sirius wouldn't have spent as much time in Azkaban. He also remembered the end of his first year at Hogwarts, when he'd asked Dumbledore why Voldemort had wanted to kill him. Dumbledore refused to answer, promising to tell him he'd answer when he was older, and to 'put it from your mind for now, Harry.' At the time, he'd accepted that kind of answer from Dumbledore, but no more. His mum had mentioned something about a pensieve. He'd have to ask Hermione or Sirius what that is.

Thoughts of Hermione made his examine the jewelry his mother had left him. He'd immediately decided to give the silver stag necklace, as well as one of the wedding rings, to Hermione. They could wear the rings on strings or chains around their necks. He briefly thought about how many necklaces Hermione would end up wearing. She had the locket he'd given her on Valentine's Day, as well as that strange hourglass necklace she wouldn't let him touch. He figured she could also wear it on another finger if she liked. Both rings were gold, with a red gem that looked like a ruby on each. He then briefly glanced at the legal documents. He didn't notice anything unusual there except for a few deeds to houses he was already aware of.

He finally reached the bottom of the box, where the photo album was. It had muggle pictures of his mother growing up from the time she was a baby until she went to Hogwarts. Some of them included her parents, as well as Petunia. One picture that stood out to Harry was of Lily and Petunia standing with their arms around each other's shoulders. His mum couldn't have been older than ten. They appeared to be very close at that time. "Before she got her Hogwarts letter," Harry thought to himself. After that, most of the pictures, even the ones with Lily's family, were moving pictures. He saw his mum wearing her Gryffindor uniform in several pictures. He noticed a few girls, one from Gryffindor and the other from Ravenclaw, that appeared in several of them. He also found pictures of his parents together in their school robes, even a few with other Marauders. He was pleased to see that every one with Peter Pettigrew in them had him cowering in a corner while the others glared at him. He saw several pictures from his parents' wedding, as well as a single picture from Vernon and Petunia's wedding, which had a notation that said even though they weren't invited to the wedding, she'd gotten her sister to mail one picture to her. He also saw several with him as a baby, including one of him being held by each of the Marauders. He chuckled when he saw himself crying in the one where Wormtail was holding him.

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The next morning Harry woke up early in anticipation of the events of the day. This was Harry's first time waking up knowing that the Dursleys had no legal claim on him! Harry was going to show the contents of his mum's box to Sirius and Hermione. Hermione and he were going to get their laptops, and get started working on them. Sirius was going to give them books on becoming animagi. This was definitely going to be a busy day! He took his mum's box downstairs with him, intending on showing the contents and giving Hermione the charms before they left. When he got downstairs, he was surprised to see Sirius already up, eating an omelet that Dobby had apparently made. He said, "Good morning, Sirius," just as he sat down at the table.

Before Sirius could reply, Dobby popped at Harry's side and enthusiastically said, "Good morning Harry Potter sir! Is Harry Potter wishing for breakfast?"

"Yes Dobby, that would be great," said Harry. He didn't think he'd ever get used to having a servant, even if he was getting paid.

"What is Harry Potter wanting?" asked Dobby.

"Er, the same thing Sirius has got."

Dobby snapped his fingers, causing a plate with an omelet to appear, along with a glass of pumpkin juice. Dobby then asked, "Is there anything else that Harry Potter wishes Dobby to do, sir?"

"No, Dobby. Thanks for the breakfast." Dobby then disappeared.

"Is that your mother's box you brought with you, pup?" asked Sirius.

"Yeah," said Harry. "I went through it last night, and I wanted to show you and Hermione what was in it."

Sirius smiled. "I'm glad you want to share this with me. Do you want to wait for Hermione?"

"No, that's ok. I can show you now, and then when she shows up, I'll show her in private. Which reminds me, based off of the letter, my mum seems to be a lot like Hermione."

Sirius smiled. "Yes she was Harry. I didn't want to make you uncomfortable by mentioning it, but Hermione does remind me a lot of your mother." Sirius sighed. "Now let's see what's in the box."

"The first thing I should show you is the letter my mum wrote me."

While Sirius was reading the letter, Harry could see him look very sad at some parts, angry at others, and happy at others. Aside from chuckling a bit at what Harry figured was memories of the Marauders, Sirius was silent while he read the letter. When he was finished, he grinned. "Lily never admitted that she approved of the Marauders' pranks." Harry chuckled. "If I'd known that the Dursleys could've

gotten me out of Azkaban years ago just by giving you what was yours, I'd have been a lot less friendly when we visited them."

"Yeah," said Harry, "But you'd have landed yourself back in Azkaban, and this time you'd have been guilty."

"I suppose so. Lily and James never told us about this prophecy. I don't suppose Dumbledore told you about it."

"Well," said Harry, "Near the end of my first year at Hogwarts, I asked him why Voldemort tried to kill me. He said he'd tell me when I'm older, and I should put that question out of my mind."

"That sounds just like Dumbledore!" said Sirius, clearly upset. "He always decides who gets to know what! If this prophesy is about you, then you have the right to know about it! Come to think of it, as your guardian I have the right, too!" At that moment, an owl flew inside, carrying a copy of the Daily Prophet. After Sirius took the paper and paid the bird, he said, "Let's see if Dumbledore's kept his promise about the teachers yet."

He unrolled the paper and smiled when he read the headline. He put it on the table so Harry could read it too.

*"Headmaster Dumbledore of Hogwarts fires four teachers on the same day!"*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*In an unprecedented move, Albus Dumbledore has just terminated Professors Snape of Potions, Trelawney of Divination, Binns of History of Magic, and Willoford of Muggle Studies. When asked about his decision, Professor Dumbledore replied, 'Over two thirds of my students signed a petition demanding that I raise the quality of education. After investigating their allegations, I came to realize the errors I have made in allowing those professors to continue teaching here. I wish to apologize to the parents for subjecting their children to a lower quality of education in those subjects, and promise to raise the quality of education back to where it should be for as long as I am headmaster. I've simply been reminded that the students should always come first.' Professor Snape, who was also the head of*

*Slytherin house, on the other hand, said that the petition was, ‘Utter nonsense,’ and that Professor Dumbledore was letting ‘Harry Potter run the school.’ Potter was one of the many students to sign the petition. Interestingly enough, the only people we could find that had anything good to say about Snape were students from his own house. This shouldn’t be surprising, considering that one of the many allegations on the petition, which is on page twelve, was that he favored his own students. Trelawney appeared distraught, but claimed she had foreseen it. When this reporter asked if that meant she’d found another job, she refused to comment. One of the accusations against her is that she is a fraud. Binns is a ghost that has bored generation of students, including this reporter, and had no comment, which was a great relief. This reporter was concerned that he would bore us with a five hour lecture on the history of Hogwarts. Willoford also had no comment, although an investigation into his past suggests that he has never once in his life left the wizarding community. We can’t even prove he’s ever met a muggle in his life. What this reporter wonders is why Albus Dumbledore has let these kind of teachers stay at Hogwarts until the students, sick of the low quality of education, had to practically force their headmaster to do anything about it. Of course, Professor Dumbledore has always been eccentric...”*

“Well,” said Sirius, “At least the Prophet favors the teachers getting fired. You may notice that this particular reporter seems incapable of portraying anybody in a positive light.”

“What do you mean?” asked Harry, “I agree with what she said about Dumbledore waiting until we demanded a change.”

“Yes you do, but think about it. She could have made Dumbledore look bad by claiming the teachers were good. Or she could have made Dumbledore look good by claiming the teachers were bad. Instead, she’s made all of them look bad so that parents who read this paper will be glad there are new teachers but still don’t have confidence in the headmaster.” He sighed. “She didn’t even really compliment the students for demanding a better education. If she’d wanted, she could have pointed out how the petition was spearheaded by you and Hermione, two students at the top of their year.”

"I don't really like to be famous, but I see your point," said Harry. "At least that would be for something I did."

At that moment, Hermione came through the fireplace beaming, carrying her own copy of the paper as she made her way to the dining room. "Good morning Harry, Sirius!" She then noticed the paper on the table. "I see you've already gotten the good news," she said, and then kissed Harry.

After they discussed the article for a few minutes, Hermione noticed the box on the table. "Harry," she asked, "Is that what I think it is?"

"If you think it's the box from my mother, then yes."

"I think I'll go to my room for something," said Sirius.

Harry nodded, "Thanks Sirius," as the door closed. He then turned to Hermione. "I already showed him the stuff, and I told him I wanted to be alone with you for this."

She smiled. "Ok."

She started crying right after she began reading, and didn't stop. When she was done, she hugged Harry tightly. After a few minutes in that embrace, when Hermione had stopped crying, she pulled out of their embrace enough so she could face him. "She really loved you, Harry."

Harry smiled. "I know." He then looked her directly in the eyes. "Does she remind you of anybody?"

"Er," Hermione blushed, "Well, I guess a little bit like, er, me. I have been called a know-it-all."

Harry chuckled. "I asked Sirius if you really were like my mum, and he said that you are very much like her."

Hermione turned even more red. "I know we both love you."

Harry then looked serious. "There are a few things I want you to have." He then took his mother's wedding ring and necklace out of

the box. He was already wearing his father's ring on his right index finger.

"No, Harry. You can't give those to me. They're too important!"

"You're important to me, Mine! They can help protect you. Please Mine, take them for me." He then proceeded to give her the most pathetic puppy-dog eyes she'd ever seen in her life.

She sighed. "Since I know you won't take no for an answer." She took the ring and put it on her right index finger as she'd noticed Harry had done. She then said, "Fasten the necklace around me, Hero."

He did as she asked, noticing the heart locket that was already hanging from her neck. Realizing something was missing, he asked, "Where's that hourglass necklace at?"

She took a deep breath. "I suppose I can tell you about it now that I've returned it to Professor McGonagall. It's a Time-Turner."

"A what?"

"A device that allowed me to travel back in time so I could attend two classes at once."

Harry looked amazed. "That's how you handled that crazy schedule! I wondered, but I figured if you didn't want to tell me it was none of my business."

She smiled at him. "That's one of the reasons I love you. You respect my privacy. I wanted to tell you about it, but I'd promised McGonagall I wouldn't."

"Why'd you return it?" asked Harry.

"It was driving me crazy. I think it would have been even worse if I didn't have you. I don't need it now that I've dropped Muggle Studies and Divination."

"Why did you say it was dangerous?"

“I said it can be dangerous,” corrected Hermione. “Before she let me have it, she lectured me on how many wizards and witches have lost their lives meddling with time and told me not to use it for any other reason than to attend my classes.”

“Ok. So you didn’t do anything dangerous with it then?”

“No, Hero.”

“Alright. You ready to get Sirius so we can get some serious laptops?”

She smiled. “All right.”

They carried the box up to Harry’s room and then knocked on Sirius’ door.

“Come in,” they heard his voice call from inside the room.

They opened the door and saw him sitting on his bed staring at a piece of parchment. “What’s that?” asked Harry.

“A letter I just got from Dumbledore.” He then looked up at them. “He wants me to teach potions and to be the head of Slytherin.”

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 13 – The Prophesy

“Slytherin!” exclaimed Harry. “What’s he playing at? You’re a Gryffindor!”

“I know,” said Sirius. “The rest of my family was in Slytherin, and I was proud to not be like them! Maybe I’ll teach, but I don’t want anything to do with Slytherin!”

“You’re good at potions?” asked Hermione, clearly curious.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah. Professor Slughorn, he was the teacher at the time, always said I had a gift for it. I got an ‘O’ in both my O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. in the subject. Before I was arrested, I used to make Moony’s potion for him.”

“Wolfsbane?” asked Hermione.

“Yeah.” He sighed. “I guess I might as well accept the teaching job. I don’t have anything else lined up, and it’ll give me a chance to put the two of you in detention. But I won’t take that Head of Slytherin position!”

“Maybe you should,” said Hermione, causing both Harry and Padfoot to stare at her. She looked determinately at them and said, “Think about it. A child would display ambition and possibly evil potential to the sorting hat, so it puts them into Slytherin. Then, under Snape’s guidance, they learn to achieve their goals through cheating, lying, and favoritism. Their head of house always looked the other way when they did wrong. Harry you remember what happened when you got in that fight with Malfoy last January. Snape took points from me for telling him that Malfoy called me a mudblood! Maybe with a head of house who won’t let them get away with that sort of thing, those kids may turn out better. Sirius, you can even tell them about Azkaban, the place every one of them seems to be headed. I think Snape is teaching every one of them to be Death Eaters!”

Harry was agreeing with her logic, but then was confused by a term she’d used. “What’s a Death Eater? I know you called Draco Malfoy the son of one, but I don’t know what it means.”

Sirius answered the question. “Voldemort’s supporters. And she’s right to call Lucius Malfoy one. He was part of Voldemort’s inner circle. He was arrested, his family donated a large amount of gold to the ministry, and he was released, claiming he was being controlled. All those idiots had to do was roll up his sleeve to see his Dark Mark, but those imbeciles that took his bribe wouldn’t allow it!”

Harry smiled, “It would be worth it just to see the look on Draco Malfoy’s face when he finds out my guardian is his head of house.”

Sirius took a deep breath. “Harry, do you really want me to take that position?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“All right!” Sirius said. “Now let’s go to that muggle electronics store I’ve heard so much about.”

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Sirius apparated Harry near the store, and then came back to apparate Hermione. When they arrived, the salesperson they’d previously had recognized Harry and Hermione immediately from their previous purchase of about half the store. “Hello again. May I help you?”

“Yes,” said Hermione. “Would you mind showing us your laptop computers?”

After spending a few minutes looking, Harry picked out the best one they had. It had a fifteen inch screen with the latest graphics card, etc. Sirius decided that since he was teaching, he’d get one of his own, provided the two kids would show him how to use it. The one Harry had picked out cost a few hundred pounds more than Hermione’s parents had specified she could spend, so she was going to settle for a lesser one until Harry insisted that he make up the difference and had the salesperson split the cost into two receipts – one that was how much her parents wanted to spend, and the other was the rest of the cost, which was to be added to Harry’s bill. Harry also picked up a few printers that Hermione assured him could be charmed to print onto parchment. When he went to pay for it, Sirius said, “I’m paying

for that, along with my computer," and proceeded to pull muggle money out of his wallet.

After they'd apparated back to Potter Manor, Hermione said, "I'm going to charm my laptop now, and I want both of you to pay attention because I want you to charm your own."

"Come on Hermione, you know you a lot smarter than us," said Harry. "What if we mess them up?"

She rolled her eyes at them, "You won't mess them up if you just pay attention."

Sirius said, "I don't know anything about how to work a computer."

"You don't need to understand everything. Just do what I do." They all set their laptops side by side at the table, and the two males imitated exactly what Hermione did. The result was that all three laptops were working perfectly, with a magical battery and Internet connection just like Harry's PCs. After she'd inspected them and put them on their private network, she said, "See, I knew you could both do it. Now let's put a few library books onto the network."

"That reminds me," said Sirius, "I was gonna give you the books on becoming animals today."

Hermione then performed a spell that copied the contents of some of the books from the library, including Lily Potter's book on charming muggle plugs as well as the book on animagi, onto the main computer on the fifth floor so that any of the laptops could access it. That way, they could easily be searched through for keywords, instead of visually scanning page after page. They immediately tested it with the laptops, all of which had easy, fast access to the books.

After they'd copied about a dozen books, Dobby popped up and said, "Harry Potter, Sirius Black, and Hermione Granger, Dobby is reminding you that it is lunch time. What is you wanting?"

Hermione spoke first. "Pizza, with pepperoni and sausage."

"And extra cheese," said Harry.

Sirius grinned, "And Brussels sprouts."

"No!" said a distraught Harry. "Dobby, I'm your master and I say to NEVER EVER, under any circumstances are you to put brussels sprouts on a pizza! Is that clear?"

Dobby bowed to the ground, "Yes Harry Potter sir." He then turned to Sirius, who was laughing along with Hermione. "Dobby is sorry sir, but Dobby cannot put brussels sprouts on the pizza."

After lunch, Hermione charmed both printers to work magically and print on parchment. When she was finished, she said, "Harry."

"Yeah?"

"When are you going to talk to Professor Dumbledore about that prophesy your mother mentioned?"

"I believe Lily said to do it immediately," said Sirius.

"I guess we should," said Harry. "Maybe we can floo his office to see if he's there. I'd like both of you with me."

"All right," said Sirius. Hermione nodded in agreement.

"Great," said Harry. "Padfoot, could you floo him while I get the letter?"

Sirius said, "Don't you know how to summon it yet?"

"Er," said Harry, "I think that's a fourth year spell."

Hermione looked exasperated. "Honestly. Pay attention to me." She pointed her wand toward the stairs and said, "Accio, Mrs. Potter's letter." Sirius made the call while Harry watched for the letter.

Almost as soon as the letter floated into Hermione's waiting hand, Sirius called out to them, "Come on guys. He says we can floo to his office now."

Within just a few minutes, Harry found himself falling forward from Professor Dumbledore's fireplace. Fortunately, he'd remembered to remove his glasses first, so they didn't fall down and break.

As Harry put his glasses back on, the aged Headmaster said, "Welcome Mr. Black, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger. What can I do for you? I trust you've seen today's Daily Prophet, as well as my offer of employment."

"Yes we have," said Harry, "And we're very glad you kept your promise."

"And after careful consideration," said Sirius, "I've decided to accept your offer."

"Splendid!" said Dumbledore.

"I must say that I am curious as to why you wanted me to be the head of Slytherin house, but that's not the reason we're here."

"The reason I chose you is so that you can try to undo the damage Severus has done in the way he has taught the Slytherins."

Hermione smiled. "I knew that was the reason. I tried to tell him."

Dumbledore chuckled, "You really are the brightest witch of your age. Now Sirius, you said there was a different reason you wanted to see me."

"Yes Albus," he said, "There is. Harry has recently come into possession of a letter that his mother wrote before she died."

Harry could swear that the headmaster's complexion paled a bit at this statement. "Have you?"

"Yes," said Harry. "It says that Voldemort wanted to kill me because of a prophesy that was given to you."

Dumbledore's ears became a bit pink.

“Lily said that Harry should demand for you to show him the prophesy in your pensieve immediately,” added Sirius.

“Sirius,” said Dumbledore in a grandfatherly way. “I believe that Harry is too young to be burdened with something like that.”

“He was also too young to have his parents murdered,” said Sirius. “He was also too young to be left on the doorstep of people who hated him!”

“Professor,” said Hermione politely. “If this prophesy has to do with Harry, then he has the right to see it.”

“Yeah,” agreed Harry. “And I want the people most important to me, Sirius and Hermione, to see it too!”

“This is a secret that cannot be allowed to fall into the wrong hands,” said Dumbledore sternly.

“All of us knows occlumency,” answered Hermione. “Will you tell Harry what he has the right to know or not?”

Dumbledore took a deep breath and resignedly put his wand to his forehead as he got up and opened the black cabinet where his pensieve was located. He pulled out the silvery string of memory from his mind while Harry watched. He was very confused but didn't want to look stupid, so he said nothing.

When Dumbledore had put the memory into the pensieve, he said, “This prophesy was given on a cold, wet night, fourteen years ago, in a room above the bar at the Hog's Head Inn. I had gone there to see an applicant for the post of Divination teacher, though it was against my inclination to allow the subject of Divination to continue at all. The applicant, however, was the great-great-granddaughter of a very famous, very gifted Seer, and I thought it common politeness to meet her. I was disappointed. It seemed to me that she had not a trace of the gift herself. I told her, courteously I hope, that I did not think she would be suitable for the post. I turned to leave. Just as I was about to exit the room, she turned to me and gave a real prophesy.” He then prodded the silvery substance in the pensieve with his wand.

They watched as the figure of Sybil Trelawney rose up and spoke to them.

*"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies."*

The slowly revolving Professor Trelawney sank back into the silver mass below and vanished.

The silence within the office was absolute, until Professor Dumbledore spoke. "A death eater overheard the first part of the prophesy, but was interrupted when others caught him listening at the door. Voldemort's reaction to this news was to try to kill you.

"Harry couldn't have been the only baby born at the end of July," said Sirius. "Why does it have to be him?"

"Indeed, there was one other child born at the end of July to parents who had escaped Voldemort three times. His name is Neville Longbottom."

Harry gasped, "Neville?"

"Yes," continued Dumbledore. "He was born on July 30th. However, Voldemort chose you and marked you, thus making you the one with the power to vanquish him." He then pointed at Harry's scar. Dumbledore sighed, "I had hoped to wait a few years to give you this burden."

Hermione said, "But if he's going to have to fight Voldemort, he should have as much time to prepare as possible. He's already had to face Voldemort. That prophesy didn't seem to say who would win! That means that if Harry's not properly trained the next time he faces Voldemort, he could die, and the prophesy would be fulfilled!" By this time Hermione was in tears. "Were you planning on waiting until Harry died to reveal this prophesy?"

"I suppose I should have told him about it earlier," said Dumbledore, looking older than ever. "I just couldn't bring myself to lay this burden on him while he's so young. Harry asked me why Voldemort tried to kill him after his first fight with him, but I refused to answer." He shook his head and said, "Harry, can you accept an old man's apology?"

"I guess I can," said Harry, "This is very overwhelming. But Hermione's right, if I'm gonna have to face Tom again, I'll need to start training soon."

"Maybe Sirius and Remus can help you there," suggested Dumbledore. Sirius nodded and Dumbledore continued. "They can start training you this summer and continue during the school year. When they feel they've trained you as much as they can, perhaps in a few years, I'll start training you."

Hermione said, "If I'm gonna be Harry's girlfriend, I think I should be trained as well in case Harry gets attacked while we're together."

This caused Harry to look at her in a way she immediately recognized. Before he spoke she yelled, "Don't you DARE try to break up with me over this!"

Harry put up his hands in surrender. "Ok, ok. It was just a thought."

"You should keep your loved ones close Harry, and not push them away," said Dumbledore.

"He's right, pup," said Sirius.

"Alright, sorry," said Harry. "I doubt I'd have been able to go through with it anyway."

"Well," said Sirius. "This has certainly been...educational. I think it's time we went back home. See you next term, Albus."

"Goodbye," the headmaster said.

Hermione walked up to the fireplace, threw some floo powder in it, said, "Diagon Lily," and disappeared in a flash of green flames.

Dumbledore chuckled. "I believe Miss Granger mispronounced her destination."

"Actually sir," said Harry, "That's the password for Potter Manor."

"But don't try it without our invitation," said Sirius. "No one can floo into the house unless we've set the security system to let them in."

"And we've allowed very few people access to the house," added Harry.

"Ingenious," said Dumbledore approvingly. "Anybody overhearing would have made the same mistake I did. I guess Potter Manor really is a safe place."

Within a few minutes, they were all back at Potter Manor. Hermione hugged Harry and said, "This must be hard for you, knowing you've got to face him."

Harry shrugged. "It was a shock, but truthfully, it's not much of a surprise. I've already faced Tom three times – Once when I was a baby, once when I was eleven, and once when I was twelve. If that prophesy Trelawney gave at the end of last year is true, then Tom's going to come back, so I'd probably have had to face him again. At least this time, I know I at least have a chance. Hopefully before then I'll have found this 'power that the Dark Lord knows not.' At least now that I know about it, I can try to prepare."

"We'll help you any way we can," said Sirius, "but for now, we've been invited to have dinner with the Grangers."

## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 14 – The Day Before Training Begins**

Harry spent the next day with the Grangers, who had wanted to properly congratulate him for passing his arithmancy test.

“We know how hard you worked on that, and we’re very proud of you,” said Marissa Granger, causing Harry to turn slightly pink.

“I couldn’t have done it without Hermione’s help,” said Harry, now causing his girlfriend to slightly blush.

“You’re the one who read the book...”

“Following the schedule you made for me...” argued Harry with a smile.

“Anyway,” said Adam Granger. “You’ve both worked very hard this summer, and we decided to reward you with a trip to an amusement park.”

Harry’s eyes lighted up, “Really? I’ve heard of those, but whenever the Dursleys took Dudley to one, they’d leave me with Mrs. Figg and her cats.”

Mrs. Granger sighed, “I can’t believe anyone could be that cruel to their own nephew!” She then took a deep breath. “Well, thankfully you don’t have to deal with them anymore.”

Not long after, Harry found himself inside ‘The Enchanted Earth,’ a magically themed amusement park. The first thing Harry saw was a merry-go-round with muggle representations of magical creatures to ride.

Hermione pointed them out to her parents. “Mum, Dad, do you see those magical creatures on the merry-go-round?”

“Of course, dear,” replied her mother.

“Every one of them exists,” Harry said, “although some of them, like the mermaids and hippogriffs, look very different than this ride.”

“But the unicorns and centaurs look almost exactly like the ones on the ride.”

“Hermione told us that last year a hippogriff attacked a student, er, Malfoy, if I remember right,” said Mr. Granger.

“He deserved it!” said Harry. “He wouldn’t pay attention in class. And then he faked that it was a lot worse than it really was.”

“You don’t necessarily know he was faking,” said Mrs. Granger.

“Yes we do,” said Hermione. “When the teachers weren’t looking, he’d elbow smaller kids out of his way with his supposedly bad arm. Harry’s had much more serious injuries and always tried to pretend they weren’t as bad as they were. He hates the attention they bring, while Malfoy loves getting the attention.”

“According to the letters we’ve gotten, you have gotten a lot of injuries,” said Mrs. Granger.

“They weren’t so bad,” said Harry.

“See what I mean?” said Hermione.

“The only times I get hurt is when someone interferes with a quidditch match, like the dementors last year or the stray bludger the year before that. Well, that and when I face Voldemort.”

“You really shouldn’t go after dark wizards,” said Adam. “You should leave it to other people.”

Harry hung down his head. “That’s not even an option anymore.”

“What does that mean?” asked Marissa.

“Well, er, Harry, should I tell them?” asked Hermione.

“I suppose so. They know occlumancy, so they can keep it secret.”

Hermione led them to a secluded spot away from other people. When she was sure no one could overhear, she said, “We found out yesterday that Harry is prophesied to be the only one who can defeat

Voldemort, and that one of them is destined to kill the other. That's the reason Voldemort attacked him as a baby."

"Wow, that's a lot to swallow," said Adam. "How did you find out?"

"I recently got a box that belonged to my mother. I think I told you about it." They nodded. "Anyway, one of the things in it was a letter from my mother. She said that I should demand that Dumbledore tell me about the prophesy, so yesterday Sirius, Hermione, and I went to his office and did just that."

"He's known all this time?" asked Marissa. "Why didn't he tell you sooner?"

"He wanted to wait until Voldemort killed me to say anything," said Harry disgustedly.

"That's not true!" said Hermione. "He just wanted to wait until you're older."

"I faced Voldemort when I was eleven years old," and when I recovered, I asked him why Voldemort wanted to kill me. He refused to answer. I was more in shock yesterday than anything, but now that I've had more time to think about it, I am angry at him."

"Well," said Adam, "We can't do anything about that now, so I suggest we enjoy this day."

Harry smiled. "That's a good idea. Sirius and Professor Lupin are supposed to be preparing a training schedule for me to prepare to face Voldemort, and they've warned me that it starts tomorrow. They're letting me off on my birthday and for the quidditch world cup, but aside from that, I'm gonna have to spend time training every day. So this is my last day before training begins, and I should take advantage of it."

"Harry," said Hermione, "you forgot to mention that I'm joining your training."

"What?" said both Mr. and Mrs. Granger together.

"Believe me, I don't want Hermione in danger," said Harry. "If I have any choice in the matter, she won't be fighting any dark wizards. But she pointed out yesterday that since we're dating, that could put her in danger."

"And I absolutely refused to let him break up with me when he thought of it!"

Harry smiled at that. "So anyway, if she's properly trained, then she'll have a much better chance of survival if she does get attacked."

Hermione's father took a deep breath as he grabbed his wife's hand while facing Hermione. "I don't like the idea of you in danger, but I suppose I couldn't break you two up, even if I wanted to." Then he faced Harry. "Harry, I trust you to do your best to protect her, but as a father I had to realize a long time ago that as much as I want to, I can't always protect my girl, and I doubt you'll always be able to do that either." He then turned back to his daughter. "It's a good idea to train so that you'll be able to protect yourself if you have to, but don't go looking for trouble."

"We won't," said Harry.

"Well then, I suggest we get on one of the roller coasters before the day is over."

The first ride they went on was called, "The Broomstick." It was a particularly scary one that had a train with several rows with two seats side by side that looked like brooms (except for the safety device that strapped you in). While they were in line, Harry said, "It'll be just like a game of Quidditch! It even looks like they have a few Wronski feints on the track, along with a lot of loops. It looks like they're moving faster than my firebolt!"

After they'd gone on several rides, they stopped and got some lunch. Then the Grangers let Harry and Hermione wander around the park alone for a few hours, enjoying each other's company, as well as the rides. At one point they stopped at the gift shop, and Harry bought himself, Hermione, and her parents a t-shirt that said, 'I rode the Broomstick at Enchanted Earth.' Eventually they met back up with Hermione's parents, and they all decided to go on the bumper cars,

where Harry and Hermione joined together against her parents, until Harry decided to go against Hermione as well, which caused her to fake anger until she persuaded her parents to turn on their new ally. In the end, Harry found himself trapped in a corner unable to drive his bumper car anywhere because of the three Grangers that were guarding him.

On the way home, they stopped by a restaurant, where Harry thanked them for everything. When they got to the Granger's house, Harry told them all goodbye and reminded Hermione to floo to his house at eight o'clock to start training.

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 15 – Training Begins**

The next morning, upon hearing his alarm clock start playing a cd, Harry woke up to find his laptop on his chest with a starfield simulation screensaver in progress. He pushed a button to see that he was about half way through his animagus book when he fell asleep. The program they used to view books on the computers allowed him to save where he was in the book like a bookmark so he wouldn't lose his spot. He looked at the time displayed on the bottom right of the screen to see that it was now seven o'clock. He turned off the laptop, and put it on his desk, and then turned off his alarm clock. He then took a quick shower, after which he put on a pair of shorts and his new "Broomstick" t-shirt he'd acquired at 'The Enchanted Earth' amusement park the previous day. He still had about forty minutes before training was to begin. He walked downstairs to find Dobby make his usual appearance.

"Good morning, Harry Potter! Dobby is happy to be seeing you this morning!"

"Good morning, Dobby," said Harry.

"What is Harry Potter wanting for breakfast?"

"French toast and bacon."

"Right away, sir," said Dobby. Then he snapped his fingers and disappeared.

Before Dobby returned with Harry's breakfast, Sirius came walking down the stairs with a smile on his face. "Morning pup!"

"Morning, Padfoot."

"Are you ready to start your training?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "As ready as I'll ever be."

"Moony will be here soon to help," said Sirius.

“That's great!” said Harry.

Sirius looked determinedly at Harry. “You know, he hasn't had it so easy with his 'furry little problem.' I know last year and thankfully this year he's had a job teaching, but he didn't have a job for a long time before then.”

“Er, I know that.”

“He's doing us a big favor by helping with the training.”

“Yes he is,” said Harry, not sure of where Sirius was going with this.

“Right now he's renting a place for the summer, and I thought it would be a good idea to invite him stay in one of the rooms here instead,” said Sirius.

Harry looked around. “Well, we certainly do have enough space.”

“So we're agreed?” asked Sirius. “I can invite him today?”

“Well, as long there's a backup plan for dealing with his furry little problem in case something goes wrong and he doesn't drink his potion, then I don't see any problem with it.”

Sirius grinned. “It wouldn't be good to have a werewolf running loose around Potter Manor, would it? Don't worry. He's got a cage at his place that he can move into his room immediately.”

“Ok. Invite him.”

“Great!”

At that moment Dobby returned with Harry's breakfast. While Harry started eating, Dobby took Sirius' order and returned with it shortly thereafter. Just as Harry finished his breakfast, they heard someone coming out of the fireplace. Harry got up to greet his guest.

“Good morning, Harry!” said Hermione, coming over to give him a quick kiss. She was dressed very much like him, with shorts and her

new “Broomstick” t-shirt. Her hair was in a ponytail, which was a bit unusual for her.

Harry said, “I see you've got your hair different today.”

Hermione turned slightly pink. “I'm not sure exactly what the training will consist of, so I wanted to make sure my hair wouldn't get in the way.”

“It looks nice.”

She turned a bit redder. “Thanks. Is Professor Lupin here yet?”

“No, but he should arrive any minute. Sirius and I are gonna invite him to move in for the summer.”

“That's great! That should be a big help to him! You certainly have the room for him.”

At that moment, the fireplace was momentarily engulfed in green flames as Professor Lupin arrived. “Hello Harry, Hermione!” he said cheerfully. “How are you?”

“We're fine, Professor,” said Hermione. “How are you?”

“We're not in school. You both can call me Remus, or Moony.”

“Thanks Moony!” said Harry. “Sirius should be about finished with breakfast by now. Then we can start the training.”

“Actually,” came Sirius' voice from behind a door that began opening, “Sirius is finished. Good morning, Moony.”

“Morning Padfoot. What do you think? Shall we go to the exercise room?”

“Sounds like a good idea to me.”

They walked into the exercise room, which looked like an average gym. It consisted of one full-size basketball court, complete with hoops, as well as extra space that held a few exercise machines that Harry did not remember being there before.

Moony walked to the middle of the basketball court. “I thought we’d start off with an hour of physical exercise. Most Death Eaters are so spoiled using spells for everything, that they don’t even know what running is. You seem to be in good shape, but we want to make sure. In a week or two, once we’re sure you’re both in shape, we’ll add muggle fighting techniques to the workout. For now we’ll concentrate on building up your strength and endurance. To start with, we’ll do some stretches.”

A grueling and difficult hour later, after stretching, running laps, lifting weights, and many other forms of torture, er, exercise, all four of them went to different bathrooms and took a much needed shower. “At least we’re all doing the same exercises,” thought Harry to himself. He could see that it was at least as hard on the adults as it was on Hermione and himself. They all found themselves back in the torture chamber fifteen minutes after they’d left.

“Now we’ll practice fighting with magic,” Lupin said. “Get your wands at the ready.” They pulled their wands out of the invisible wrist holsters Sirius had picked up the day before. Lupin then taught them several offensive and defensive spells commonly used in combat for half an hour, starting with *expelliarmus* and ending with the *protego* shield.

They then started dueling. It was Harry against Sirius and Hermione against Remus. Within ten minutes, both Harry and Hermione were on the ground. Their partners helped them get up, and then Sirius said, “You both actually did well for you’re first duel against fully trained wizards. Now let’s talk about how we beat you.” They spent the next half hour discussing their specific duels and dueling strategy. They then dueled the same partners, and this time both teens lasted fifteen minutes before being beaten. They then switched to have Hermione face Sirius while Harry faced Remus. Ten minutes later, the teens were both stunned and on the floor. Sirius said, “You both got used to one particular opponent. You did do very well for your age, but you’ll need to be ready to face anyone.”

“As Sirius said,” said Moony, “you both did remarkably well, but we want to be realistic. There’s a real possibility that you’ll end up fighting Death Eaters who are at least as skilled as Padfoot and myself.

We're holding back curses that would hurt you, but Death Eaters won't hold them back. They wouldn't think twice about killing you. As useful as the protego shield is, you need to make sure you physically dodge every spell, because spells like the death curse will go right through your shields. You should still raise the shield anyway just in case you don't move quickly enough. Another thing I want you to practice on your own is nonverbal magic. It's very difficult, and a lot of Death Eaters can't do it, but some of them can. Voldemort himself certainly can."

"Er," said Harry. "I don't want to sound stupid, but what's nonverbal magic?"

Sirius smiled while Hermione frowned. Lupin said, "Nonverbal magic is when you cast a spell without saying the words."

"Like when I blew up my Aunt Marge?" asked Harry.

"Yes," said Lupin. "I heard about that. I'm guessing that you didn't use a wand either."

"Er, now that you mention it," said Harry, "I didn't. How is that possible?"

"Everyone can do wandless magic," said Lupin calmly. "That's how almost all accidental magic occurs for children. A wand helps you focus your magic. The more complex the spell, the harder it is to do without a wand." Lupin then looked thoughtful for a moment. "If you could learn some wandless magic, it would certainly be a great tactical advantage if you dropped your wand. One good wandless spell to learn would be how to summon your wand. We'll eventually work on wandless magic as well, but not before you've mastered nonverbal spell casting. If we can get you guys able to duel successfully with nonverbal wandless magic, you'll be practically unstoppable. If you want to practice nonverbal spells on your own, I'd suggest trying it with simple first year spells. If you master that, then go on to second year, and then third."

"All right," said Hermione, with a determined look on her face.

"Well then," said Lupin, "I think I should be headed home."

“Actually,” said Sirius. “Harry and I were talking this morning, and we feel that it would be a lot easier for training if you moved into one of the empty bedrooms.”

Lupin grinned at them, but said, “Oh no guys. I know what you’re doing, and I appreciate it, but I can’t...”

“This house has tons of empty bedrooms,” said Sirius. “There’s no point in wasting all that space. What’s the point in renting a place just for the summer when there’s plenty of room for you here?”

“I don’t want to impose...” said Lupin.

“You’re not imposing, Moony,” said Harry. “You’re doing Hermione and I a great favor by training us. It may very well save our lives! This is the least we can do, and I won’t take no for an answer!”

Lupin shrugged his shoulders. “Well, I guess I have no choice then. Sirius, why don’t you help me get my stuff?”

“We’ll help too...” said Hermione, who had stayed out of the discussion so far since it wasn’t her home.

“That won’t be necessary,” said Sirius. “We can do it a lot faster magically, and you’re not allowed to do magic. You’ll just be in the way. Hermione, I assume your parents are at work.” She nodded. “Then I suppose we should take you with us.”

Lupin smiled and said, “Why don’t you bring along those laptops of yours that Sirius told me about yesterday and play some games on them while Padfoot and I pack?”

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 16 – Practicing Nonverbal Magic

The next morning, Harry woke up at seven o'clock again, although this time he'd turned off his laptop before he went to sleep. He showered and went downstairs to find Lupin already sitting at the table. Harry said, "Good morning, Moony."

"Oh, good morning Harry. I didn't expect you to be up yet."

"I get up at seven every morning now since..."

"Good morning Harry Potter sir! What can Dobby be getting Harry Potter for breakfast?"

After Harry had ordered breakfast and Dobby disappeared, an owl flew in the window carrying the latest Daily Prophet to Remus Lupin. After he'd paid the owl, he unrolled the paper. As he read the front page, it appeared to Harry that Lupin's eyes bulged out and his face gave a half smile. "Well," Lupin said, "I guess we won't have to worry about Wormtail anymore." Lupin then handed the paper to Harry.

### *Peter Pettigrew Dead!*

*Peter Pettigrew, the fugitive who had betrayed James and Lily Potter to You-Know-Who thirteen years ago is finally dead. He was caught by Bertha Jorkins of the Department of Games and Sports. "I was on vacation, and in a pub when Pettigrew came up to me to talk. I immediately recognized him from the pictures that the Ministry distributed to all of its personnel when he escaped. I turned my wand on him, and he turned into a rat." Pettigrew tried fleeing the scene when a cat that belonged to the owner caught him and clawed the rat's neck, which caused almost immediate death. As soon as he was dead, the rat reverted to its original form of the traitor, Peter Pettigrew.*

The article went on to describe the details of when and where it happened, but the bottom line was that Pettigrew is now history. "Wow," said Harry. I guess we don't have to worry about him helping Voldemort."

"I see you get the paper too," said Sirius as he walked into the dining room. "Can you imagine," he said with a grin, "A Death Eater killed by a cat!"

"That's what Ron thought Crookshanks did," said Harry, chuckling.

"Somehow, it's fitting," said Remus.

"That cat made the world a better place," said Sirius with a smile.

Not long after, Hermione showed up at the house with yet another copy of the prophet. The only comment she had to add was, "Too bad it wasn't Crookshanks. He'll be very disappointed that he's lost his chance." Everyone laughed at that.

After another grueling training session, Harry and Hermione began practicing nonverbal spells. Harry was pointing his wand at a quill concentrating on the words, "Wingardium Leviosa," but all his feather would do is turn around. Hermione's feather, on the other hand, was at least five feet above the desk. "How do you do it?" asked Harry, doing his best not to sound irritated with his girlfriend.

"I know, now you can't stand me," said Hermione with a grin, imitating Ron from their first year when they'd first learned the spell, "I'm a nightmare, honestly."

Harry chuckled. "You are not a nightmare! You're my dream come true."

She blushed a bit. "I think your problem is that you're concentrating on the words instead of intent. Remember that whenever you've used nonverbal magic, you were not thinking of magic words, only what you wanted to happen." She then smirked. "Try it again, Hero. I'll give you one kiss for every foot your feather rises."

Harry put a very serious look on his face as he concentrated on the feather rising from the desk. He also thought the words, but that wasn't his main focus. He smiled as the feather started rising, and concentrated even harder, causing it to rise above her feather. He then got another idea, and concentrated on the feather going out the window where both he and Hermione watched it float into the sky and

out of their range of vision. Harry smirked at his girlfriend. "Well, Mine, how many feet would you say the feather floated?"

Her face flushed, but she looked admiringly at Harry. "Dozens," she said as she approached him and started paying her debt.

A few minutes later, Sirius and Lupin walked into the room to find the young couple passionately snogging on a couch. They looked at each other and grinned. Each of them silently conjured a bucket of water, and they snuck to either side of the couch. Sirius used his fingers to show one-two-three-now. The couple broke apart immediately as they found themselves drenched with the two remaining Marauders laughing their heads off.

"Padfoot, Moony, I, I'll get you back..." shouted Harry as he tried to stop himself from laughing with them.

Hermione however, appeared mortified, and hid her red face in her hands as she dripped water all over the floor. As soon as Harry saw that, he put his arms around her waist and said, "They didn't mean any harm, Hermione. It was just a joke."

"They, they must think I'm a, a..."

"No Hermione," said Sirius, "We do not think badly of you! It was just a prank! I actually think you're very good for Harry." Sirius then performed a drying spell on Hermione while Lupin did the same with Harry. Hermione half-smiled and said, "I should probably be headed home."

"Hermione, you do not have to leave," said Harry.

"I, er, it really is about time I was headed home." She then lightly kissed Harry on the cheek. "I'll see you tomorrow morning, Harry."

After she flooed away, Harry glared at the Marauders.

"Honestly Harry, we didn't want her to leave," said Lupin. Harry remained silent.

"We're sorry," said Sirius, "But I do think that this would be a good time to have a talk about girls." Lupin very discreetly left the room while Harry's expression changed from anger to embarrassment.

An hour later, Harry walked up the stairs into his room with his mind spinning, even more embarrassed than before, yet educated by Sirius in ways that the Dursleys never would have educated him.

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In the meantime, Hermione emerged from the fireplace in her home mortified. Tears had started falling from her eyes. She started making her way toward her bedroom, hoping not to see any of her parents. She walked up the stairs toward her room, but was stopped when she heard her mother call her name. "I'm busy," she called down the stairs as she closed herself in her room. She flopped herself onto her bed in time to hear her mother open her door.

"What's wrong, Hermione?"

"Nothing," she answered.

"Then why are you crying? Did you have a fight with Harry?"

"No, it's just that...Nevermind, it's not important."

"It's apparently important to you, honey."

"It's just that Sirius and Remus caught Harry and I, er, well, snogging, and well, I was embarrassed. I know it's silly, but..."

"You're confused right now, Hermione, and you're feeling things that make you uncomfortable. You care so much for Harry, but you're wondering if you're going too fast or too slow. It terribly mortified you when other people caught you."

"Yes, mum," said Hermione.

Marissa put her hand on her daughter's shoulder. "We've never had that talk, have we?"

The next day when Hermione came over for training, she and Harry kept glancing shyly at each other. When training was over, they found themselves alone in the living room.

Harry looked down at the floor. "Er, Hermione, about yesterday..."

"I'm sorry that I left that way," she interrupted. "I wasn't mad at you or even Sirius and Lupin. I was embarrassed at being caught, er..."

"Snogging me senseless?" supplied Harry.

"Er, yes," said Hermione. "When I got home, my mum caught me crying, and when she found out what was bothering me, she, well, talked to me about relationships and all that kind of things."

Harry smiled weakly, "Sirius gave me that talk too, after you left."

"One of the things that my mum suggested was that we set boundaries now, before we go further than we intend."

"Oh, er, boundaries. Like whether you want to snog anymore." Harry took a deep breath. "I don't want to do anything you're uncomfortable with, Hermione. I don't want you to feel pressured by me. If that's how you felt yesterday, I'm very sorry, and I promise it won't happen again if you'll forgive me."

Hermione chuckled slightly. "You weren't pressuring me, Hero. We were both stumbling along. That's the furthest either of us has gone."

Harry smiled shyly. "So, you don't want to go that far anymore Mine."

Hermione's cheeks went a little red. "I, er, didn't say that. Well, as a matter of fact, I would like to continue snogging like that, but I don't want to go any further than that for a while. That is, if you're comfortable with it."

Harry grinned. "That's fine with me, but first, I think we should practice more nonverbal magic so that I can earn more snogs from you.



## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 17 – Magic, Brooms, and Birthdays**

The next day, training found Harry and Hermione outside flying around the quidditch pitch on broomsticks to learn defensive flying. In other words, how to fly so that someone who's chasing you can't hit you with a spell. Harry and Sirius were on Firebolts, while Lupin and Hermione were on Cleansweeps that Sirius was kind enough to provide. He'd bought enough brooms so that if they ever had enough people over, they could have a full quidditch game. The collection consisted of twelve Cleansweeps and his and Harry's Firebolts, not to mention a set of quidditch balls.

Harry had spent a few hours with Hermione the previous evening helping her master basic riding skills (after their nonverbal magic and snogging sessions). She always had a hard time controlling her broom, so Harry felt it would be better for her to have practice flying beforehand. They also had the important issue of retaliation for the prank the Marauders had pulled on them a few days before to discuss. They planned the prank to occur during this training session.

“Hermione,” said Lupin, “You’re actually doing a lot better than I thought you would. Most people who aren’t on the quidditch team, especially the intellectual ones, aren’t that good at flying.”

She chuckled, “You mean bookworms like me, don’t you Moony?”

“Er, well,” said Moony. “I guess you could...”

“Ouch!” said Hermione, as Sirius got her with a shot that gave her a very light jolt.

“The first rule of defensive flying,” said Sirius with a smirk, “is to not get distracted.”

She stuck out her tongue at Sirius while Harry yelled, “That wasn’t fair. You were supposed to be after me, while Lupin was after her!”

A serious look came on both Padfoot and Moony’s face as Moony replied, “Do you think the Death Eaters will play fair? Sirius only gave her a jolt, but it could just as easily been a death curse.”

“I guess you’re right,” admitted Hermione. “I’ve got to pay attention to everything that’s going on around me.”

“Exactly,” said Sirius.

They continued practicing for about an hour. Harry got a few shots at both Lupin and Sirius, while avoiding getting hit at all. He figured that was due to his quidditch reflexes, always avoiding the bludgers. Hermione, on the other hand, couldn’t get one shot to make contact with their opponents, but did manage to avoid getting hit again.

She winked quickly at Harry, who winked back. Harry shouted out at the Marauders, “How about if we practice me simply trying to escape you?”

Sirius and Moony looked at each other for a moment, and then Sirius said, “Alright. Go.”

Harry flew off around the yard avoiding them as best he could, which was very good. He kept weaving around avoiding all their shots while Hermione quietly made her way toward the pool. Harry flew under the pavilion with them following behind. When he got out he moved the broom straight up and over the pavilion while his pursuers were still following, taking shots whenever they could, which wasn’t often at the velocity Harry made them pursue. Harry flew over the pool, and Hermione, who was now on the ground, started a spell. As the Marauders approached the center of the pool, a cyclone of water came up out of the the pool, surrounding them, and pulling them and their brooms into the water. Hermione walked up to the edge of the pool laughing while Harry flew down next to her. He said to the two men who were now swimming toward the surface, “You’ve got to pay attention to everything that’s going on around you.”

“You never know when you’re going to be ambushed,” finished Hermione. Everyone, even the victims, burst out laughing.

“That’s one way to catch Death Eaters!” said Sirius as he climbed up out of the pool. While Lupin was pulling himself out of the water, Harry nonverbally dried Sirius off, and then Hermione did the same for Lupin. “Wow!” said Sirius, “I guess you have been practicing more than just snogging!” Harry and Hermione both blushed slightly.

"Not only that, but we've both finished that book," said Hermione defiantly.

Sirius smiled, "Good! We'll talk about that later. Right now, I'd like to see how much nonverbal magic you can perform."

They then gave demonstrations of various spells, starting with Wingardium Leviosa and ending with the summoning charm (which Hermione insisted on teaching Harry after she found out he didn't know it). When Harry had silently summoned his new photo album from his room, the Marauders both looked at him in surprise. Sirius asked, "Wasn't that in your room?"

"Of course," he said, "Didn't you see it come out my window?"

"Er, no," Lupin replied. "We weren't looking toward the house. We were expecting you to summon something closer. Hermione, can you summon things that far away?" She then summoned Harry's pillow from his bed.

"So what?" asked Harry.

"Most people your age have a hard time summoning something that far verbally. Have you tried any wandless magic yet?" asked Sirius.

"No," both Hermione and Harry replied.

"I'd suggest you try it now," said Lupin. "Put down your wands and try levitating one of these chairs nonverbally," he said, motioning toward the chairs surrounding the pool.

Instinctively, each held out a hand toward the chairs they were aiming at, and almost immediately, both of them started to float. Hermione's went about six feet in the air, while Harry's went about eight feet. The Marauders just stood there with their mouths hanging open until both of the teenagers lowered the chairs to the ground.

"Why haven't you tried nonverbal spells in our combat?" asked Sirius.

"We haven't practiced those types of spells yet, and didn't want to leave ourselves vulnerable if it didn't work," said Hermione.

"Well," said Lupin. "I suggest you practice it tonight so that you can try it tomorrow. Also, see if you can fight with wandless magic. You know, stunning spells or anything."

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In the week or so that followed, Harry and Hermione began using nonverbal spells in combat training. At first they were doing a bit worse than they had been when they used verbal magic, but within a few days, they finally beat Sirius and Remus. After they'd won two days in a row, Sirius suggested that Harry and Hermione start using wandless magic, which they'd continued practicing every afternoon. It took three days of losing badly to the Marauders before they'd finally gotten up to a competitive level. They'd decided not to let anyone else except possibly Dumbledore know about their nonverbal and wandless magic skills.

They also practiced defensive flying every day with the Marauders, who never flew above the pool again. Harry was amazed at how Hermione improved once she'd gotten over her initial fear of heights. He imagined that she probably could make a good chaser now.

Sirius and Remus had answered every question that the teenagers had about animagus transformation. Since both Sirius and Lupin would be at Hogwarts, it was decided that they could take the transformation potion the Saturday after it was completed. Lupin said, "At the rate you're learning everything else, I wouldn't be surprised if you two manage to make your first transformation by Christmas," which greatly pleased the young couple.

On July 31st, Harry woke up to find no owls bearing gifts for him. He walked down to breakfast like any other morning, and was treated no differently by Sirius or Remus. When Hermione came at eight, she gave him her usual 'Good morning' kiss, but didn't act any differently. He was beginning to wonder if everyone had forgotten that this was his birthday. They started their morning exercise, and went on to their combat training. Harry and Hermione managed their first stalemate, where both teams scored the same amount of hits during the hour-long fight, with the Marauders since they began using wandless

magic. "Whew," said Sirius. "I thought you were gonna win that. I know we're in for it tomorrow."

"You two really were amazing," said Lupin. "Not to get you conceited, but right now you could probably take out half of the Death Eaters we've ever seen, at least in a semi-fair fight."

"Just remember that the Death Eaters don't fight fair, and there are still a lot that you couldn't beat, not to mention Voldemort himself if and when he comes back."

"We know," said Harry and Hermione together.

"By the way pup," said Sirius, "Happy birthday." Harry smiled upon hearing that someone remembered.

"Happy birthday Harry," said Lupin and Hermione together. Hermione then gave Harry a quick kiss while Lupin and Black looked the other way.

"We wanted to throw you a surprise party here," said Sirius, "but we couldn't let anybody in here without you knowing about it."

"We invited some people to floo here in an hour for a party," said a nervous Hermione, "but we need you to tell Julius to let them in, er if you don't mind." She then pulled a list out of her pocket and handed it to Harry.

He smiled and looked down the list. He said, "I don't mind," and then muttered something like "I suppose we have to let Ron come if we let Fred, George, and Ginny. Although it would be funny to have him stuck in limbo until the party's over." The list included Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny Weasley, as well as Lee Jordon, Lavender Brown, Parvati and Padma (because Parvati asked if her sister from Ravenclaw could come) Patil, Neville Longbottom, Dean Thomas, and Seamus Finnegan. "I'll head to the library now to take care of this and then clean up."

He walked into the library and called out, "Julius."

"Yes, Harry? It's good to see you. Isn't today your fourteenth birthday?"

"Yes it is, Julius," he said, grinning as he approached the portrait of his multi-great grandfather.

"Well then," the portrait said with a big smile on his face, "Happy Birthday!"

"Thanks, that's actually what I wanted to talk to you about. The others are throwing me a party."

Julius' portrait grinned. "Yes, they told me about that. I told them that you're the only one who can allow the guests access. This way no one can surprise you. Your father liked that aspect of the security system."

Harry grinned. "So do I. I was wondering if I could just allow them access today."

"I see, so that they can come to your party, but not come when you don't want them to."

"Exactly," said Harry. "I don't want to be rude, but I want to limit the number of people with access to the house."

"We can do that. As I understand it, all the guests will be flooing in."

"That's right," said Harry, nodding.

"Just read me the list, and I'll grant them access to the floo until midnight tonight."

Harry smiled broadly. "That sounds perfect."

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The first ones to arrive were the Weasleys. Fred, George, and Ron were looking around the place while Ginny rushed up and gave Harry a quick hug while saying, "Happy birthday, Harry!" Her cheeks turned red as she backed away and began looking around the house. Harry

didn't notice the appraising look that Hermione gave the red-haired girl.

"Yeah, Happy birthday!" said Fred and George together as Dobby took their gifts.

"Er, Happy birthday," said Ron, with his head down.

"Thanks, Ron," said Harry, deciding he didn't want to spend his birthday acting awkward around Ron. "And thanks for coming."

"Sure," said Ron, "Any chance to get away from the Burrow. I heard you have a real quidditch pitch here."

"Yeah," said Harry enthusiastically. "There should be enough people here for a game of quidditch!"

"We didn't bring any brooms," said Ron. "Maybe I can go and..."

"No need, we've got enough! Sirius bought a bunch of Cleansweeps."

"Must be nice to be able to do that," muttered Ron.

"Look Ron," said Harry pleadingly, "Can we just enjoy the day? I hope they told you to bring swimming trunks."

"Yeah," said Ron, sounding a little happier. "How big is your pool?"

Within fifteen minutes, the rest of the guests had arrived, and they quickly migrated outside for a game of quidditch. Lupin was the referee and Sirius was playing. Fred and George were beaters for opposite teams because it was felt that it wouldn't be fair to have them together. The first team had Harry as seeker, George and Neville as beaters, Seamus, Parvati, and Dean as chasers, and Ron as keeper. The other team had Ginny as seeker (no one else wanted to go against Harry, and Sirius let the seeker use his firebolt in hopes of humiliating Hogwarts' famous seeker), Fred and Lee as beaters, Padma, Hermione, and Lavender as chasers, and Sirius as keeper.

In the beginning of the game, Harry was pleased while everyone else was surprised to find that Hermione was actually a pretty good chaser

now that she knew how to fly properly. During the game, while Hermione had the quaffle and was headed toward the goal, Padma asked, "How did you get to be good at quidditch?"

Hermione said simply, "Harry's been teaching me," with a smile.

"I'll bet that's not all he's been teaching you." said Parvati, with a suggestive tone, causing Hermione to blush as the other girl took the opportunity to steal the quaffle from Hermione.

In the meantime, Harry noticed that Ginny was marking him, so he started diving toward the ground as fast as he could. As he pulled up, he noticed that Ginny was still where she had been, with a smirk on her face. He flew back up to her and she winked at him and said, "Harry, I've watched every match you've played in since I started at Hogwarts, so I know when you're faking seeing the snitch. I've never understood why the other seekers are always fooled by you."

The game went on and Hermione was thrilled when she managed to score a goal on Ron, bringing her team ahead of Harry's – 160 to 150. Ron cursed loudly and apologized when he saw that everyone was looking at him.

At that moment, Harry saw the snitch for real. It was closer to Ginny than to him. He knew he couldn't fake her out to lure her away from the snitch, and he also knew it was a matter of seconds before she'd spot it herself. He briefly thought of summoning it, but figured that would be a very Slytherin thing to do. Besides, he figured Remus (or Sirius for that matter), who was judging this match, would catch him it doing it and accuse him of cheating. He decided to just go as fast as he could, hoping his experience on a firebolt would help him. Within a second, the redheaded girl was after the tiny winged ball too, and they were flying neck-in-neck for about ten seconds as they closed in on it. They both reached their hands out, and Harry was happy to see that his arm was longer than Ginny's, which got his hand around the snitch a half-second before Ginny's hand closed around his. He heard her swear under her breath as they separated moments later.

Everyone, even Harry, complimented Ginny's performance as seeker. When Harry complimented her, she blushed, but when her brothers

complimented her, she said rather crossly, “Maybe next time you play quidditch, you’ll let me join the game!”

After the quidditch match, everybody went inside to change into their swimsuits to try out Harry’s pool. Harry and Hermione had previously agreed to take off their protective jewelry whenever they went swimming. Harry was already in the water when Ginny came walking up to the edge and said, “Harry, what do you think of my new swimsuit?”

Harry gulped as he looked down to see an incredibly revealing bikini showing him that Ginny was not an eleven-year-old girl anymore. “Er, it’s, well, fine. I mean nice,” he said, glad he was submerged in the cold water up to his head.

“Thanks,” Ginny said with a smile. He saw her expression change to a frown as she looked behind him. She then turned and walked to the other side of the pool.

Harry turned around and saw Hermione glaring in the direction of Ginny, who was now in the water. He swam up to where she was and put his arms around her. He then asked, “Is there something wrong?”

Hermione smirked and said, “That depends on what you think of Ginny.”

He looked confused. “What? You don’t think that we...”

“Never mind,” said Hermione, and she gave him a very good kiss right there in the pool, earning catcalls from several people. She could swear she’d heard some of the girls say something about all of them getting to kiss the birthday boy. Harry never saw the glare Ginny was giving them, but Hermione did for a second as they separated. She whispered into his ear, “Hero, I need to go somewhere for a minute. I’ll be right back,” and kissed him one more time. He saw her whisper something to Ginny, and then they both got out of the pool. He turned around and began talking to Neville.

Hermione whispered determinately into Ginny's ear, "Ginny, we need to talk, now!"

Reluctantly, Ginny followed. When they were far enough away from everybody, Ginny innocently asked, "What's this all about?"

Hermione glared at the other girl. "I know what you're trying to do. It won't work, so I suggest you give up before you end up losing friends."

Ginny looked uncomfortable. "Er, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play dumb with me! I've seen you flirting with Harry all day, and I've seen the way you've blushed whenever he's been nice to you." Ginny blushed. Hermione continued, "I understand you liking Harry, I obviously like him myself." Hermione then blushed a little. "Actually, we're in love Ginny. Harry's not even aware that you've been making passes at him all day. He just thinks you're having a little fun." Ginny looked hurt. "Listen Gin, it's not that you're not pretty enough, because you probably are prettier than me. He's not noticing any of the other girls there, and even though he disagrees, they're all prettier than me. I don't know why I'm the lucky girl who got him, but I am. It's not that you're not nice enough or somehow not good enough for him. It's just that Harry is in love with me, and I'm in love with him. That makes him unavailable." She could see Ginny's eyes filling with unshed tears. Hermione sighed. "We both want to be your friend, Ginny, because we think you're a wonderful person. But you've got to accept that Harry and I are together, and that's not going to change."

Ginny's head was hung down. "I know. I see the way he looks at you, and wish it was me. I, he's so special, so, I don't know, great somehow. But he thinks he's just a regular person and tries to be nice to everyone, except maybe dark wizards like Tom. I mean, he saved my life when he hardly knew me. He's so brave..."

"I know, Ginny. Believe me, even though he claims he's the lucky one, I know the truth. He is without a doubt the most wonderful guy in the world."

Ginny took a deep breath. "I guess I have to accept that I'll never be more than his friend, but I should warn you." She smirked at the brunette. "I won't come between you two, but if you ever break up, I will go after him."

"Fair enough," said Hermione, smiling at the redhead, "since that's not gonna happen. We should get back to the pool."

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After another hour had passed, it was time for an early dinner, so Dobby brought food and drinks outside to the pavilion. After Remus and Sirius had dried off everyone (they decided not to tell anyone they could do magic at Potter Manor) and they changed back into their regular clothes, they all tucked in to American party foods, such as hamburgers, hot dogs, potato chips, pizza (although originally Italian, it's quite popular at American parties), and several other good things. To drink they had both Pepsi and Coke products instead of pumpkin juice.

After dinner, Dobby apparated all the presents to the now clean table. Most of what Harry got was quidditch-related products, such as a broomstick-care kit and new quidditch gloves. Remus and Sirius gave Harry advanced books on defense and potions respectively, although Sirius whispered to Harry that his laptop was also a birthday gift. Hermione had given him book on advanced charms. When it was dark enough, Remus and Sirius put on a fireworks show with products they said were provided by the Weasley twins, who stood up and bowed to everyone upon being mentioned. Not long after that, people started going home. Harry thanked everyone for coming, and made sure that everyone knew to tell him ahead of time if they were going to visit because of the security system. He didn't go into any details, because then he'd have to reveal that he was taking them all off of the 'welcome' list, and he wasn't certain how they'd feel about that.

A few minutes after the last guest left Hermione walked up to him with a smile on her face, threw her arms around his waist, and kissed him. "I love you," she told him when she'd pulled back enough to look him in the eyes.

“I love you, too,” he responded, kissing her again.

“I never gave you your real present.”

“Really,” he said suggestively, causing his girlfriend to blush.

“Not that, silly,” she said, holding out her hand to wandlessly summon something. When a neatly wrapped box landed in her hands, she said, “This.” She then handed him the box, which he eagerly opened to find – another box. Hermione burst out laughing.

“What?” asked Harry.

“The look on your face was worth all the trouble of wrapping it twice. Now open that box.”

“Fine,” said Harry, faking that he was mad. He finally got it open to reveal a black Nintendo Game Boy Advance SP, along with a dozen games. “Wow!” he said, with a smile on his face.

“I already charmed it to work with magic,” she said grinning. “This plays more games than any other portable system out there. It's actually from my parents and me, but it was my idea.”

“It's brilliant,” Harry said with a grin. He kissed her again and said, “I can honestly say this is the best birthday I've ever had!”

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 18 – A New Ally

As the next few days passed, Harry and Hermione improved greatly. It took them a few days after the party to start winning wandlessly against Sirius and Remus. After they'd been beaten three days in a row, Sirius said, "I think we need to make it tougher on you. We'll have to change things. I don't think you need us to watch you do your morning exercises anymore, so starting tomorrow morning, while one of you is exercising alone in another room, the other one will be facing the two of us alone. Then you'll switch. I've also asked my cousin, Tonks, for help. She just finished training as an Auror last week."

Harry smiled brightly, "An auror?"

"Yes," said Sirius, returning Harry's smile, "She's agreed to come here on weekends to help with your training. That reminds me, you'll have to tell Julius to let her in."

"Ok," said Harry, "Er, I think I'll need more than just the name 'Tonks' to tell Julius."

Sirius started to chuckle for a reason Harry couldn't fathom. "Tonks is her last name. That's what she likes to be called. She's a bit sensitive about her first name, and hexes anyone who uses it."

Harry and Hermione both were slightly amused at this concept. "Ok, we won't address her by her first name, but Harry needs the information to allow her entrance," said Hermione.

"It's Nymphadora," said Lupin, "But you didn't hear that from us."

"Nymphadora?" said Harry, now chuckling.

"You shouldn't make fun of people's names, Harry," said Hermione sternly, although Harry could tell she was barely containing her own laughter.

"Ok," said Harry. "Nymphadora Tonks. I'll take care of that right away. How will she be arriving?"

“By floo the first time, and after that she'll be apparating.”

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A few days later, Harry and Hermione found themselves being introduced to the young Auror. She had bright green hair, which surprised both teens.

“Wotcher. I see you're looking at my hair,” said Tonks. “Maybe you'd like it better maroon. She closed her eyes and concentrated, and her hair changed colors.

Harry said, “How did you...” but was interrupted by an astonished Hermione.

The brunette exclaimed, “You're a metamorphmagus! I read about them. They're very rare!”

“Sirius told me you were bright, Hermione.”

Hermione blushed. “I just enjoy reading is all...”

“Whatever Hermione,” said Harry. “You're the brightest witch of your age and you know it.” Hermione's face reddened even more. “Since I'm not as bright as Hermione I have to ask, what's a metamorphmagus?”

After Tonks had explained her abilities, she began to talk about her plans for their training. “Sirius and Remus said that they think you're in good enough shape to start learning the muggle fighting techniques, martial arts, they taught me in my training. They also said you're pretty good at dueling, and wanted to see if I could help you improve in that area as well. Let's start with that. I'll duel you both individually to assess your skills. Harry, you go first.”

When Harry stood in front of the young Auror, she asked, “Where's your wand?”

“Oh, er, don't tell anybody, but we don't duel with wands,” said a nervous sounding Harry.

“Wandless magic,” said a shocked Tonks. “Both of you?”

“They were destroying us in duels with their wands, so we got them to stop using them. It took them over a week before they started destroying us again,” said Sirius. “But what a wonderful week. Now Remus and I can’t beat them, even when it’s two on one.”

“So you called me here to fight some kids you can’t beat together?” said Tonks sarcastically, “Thanks a lot.” She then winked at Harry to show she wasn’t mad. “Remus, would you start the match?”

Within seconds Harry found himself moving as fast as he could as the auror kept firing shot after shot at him. He had tried to move away from each blast, but knew that some had only been stopped by his shield. He knew he’d have to stay on the defensive against this opponent, and simply look for openings when he had the chance. After several minutes, both of them were sweating profusely. Harry had managed to get a few shots at the auror, but she’d dodged them all. Harry tried to come up with a strategy. Her shield was probably too strong to penetrate even if he could get a shot in, but what about the floor. He pointed his hand toward her, and she instinctively moved out of the way, onto a piece of floor that broke loose, causing her to trip and fall. He saw her grip on her wand falter for a second. That was all it took for the wand to fly into Harry’s hand. He pointed it at his opponent, but she raised her hands and said while panting, “I give. You don’t have to stupify me.” Harry, while panting himself, walked up to her and helped her up. He then looked at the floor, which instantly repaired itself. “You didn’t point your hand at the floor to make it fix itself, and a minute ago, you were pointing your hand at me but the floor a few feet away from me broke. How did you do that?”

Harry and Hermione both smiled. She said, “Wandless magic has nothing to do with where our hands are pointing. We only move our hands out of habit.”

“Well then,” said the obviously impressed auror, “You should stop using your hands at all. The only reason I lasted as long as I did was because Harry was moving his hands, indicating his intention. If you don’t move your hands at all, no one will know what you’re doing. They won’t even know it was you that did it! They’ll be looking around

for whoever cast the spell. I think the best use of our dueling time will be breaking you of that habit. Give me a few minutes to catch my breath Hermione, and I'll duel you next."

They spent the next hour or so taking turns dueling Tonks, who was always able to hold her own until they stopped pointing their hands where they were aiming. After they took a break for the lunch Dobby prepared, Tonks said, "Now we're going to start with the physical combat training, although I'd be surprised if anyone ever gets close enough to you two for you to use it."

"Nymphadora," said Lupin, earning a glare from the young auror, "you know that Death Eaters don't fight fair. Harry and Hermione may find themselves greatly outnumbered, and be forced to use this training. That's one of the reasons their training has to be secret, so that anyone who wants to attack them will underestimate them."

"All right, all right. At least this is something I should be able to beat you two at, at least for now. By the way, Lupin, if you ever call me that again, I'll use you as a shield against these two."

After spending time showing them basic fighting moves, she had them practice first on the air, and then on each other. At first, Harry objected to fighting his girlfriend, but Hermione firmly stated, "I need this training! If you don't try to attack me, I won't be prepared to fight someone who's really trying to hurt me!" Tonks gave them specific things to practice during the week and, to Hermione's delight, a book on martial arts.

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A few days later, Harry was outside sitting near the pool while Hermione was swimming. He was playing on his Gameboy Advance, when an old owl Harry recognized as Errol, the Weasley's owl, flew into his hand, causing the small game system to fly out of his hand and into the pool."

"You stupid owl! Hermione, you want some roast owl for dinner tonight?"

"No," said a smirking Hermione. "I'll get your toy."

“Won’t it be ruined?” asked a concerned Harry.

“It would be if I hadn’t thought to make the system and the games impervious before I gave them to you.”

“The same thing you did to my glasses at that match where I fell?”

“Yes. Your broom was destroyed, your body was hurt, but your glasses were perfectly in tact. I did the same thing to my laptop.”

“Could you do that to mine?”

She sighed, “I suppose so, but I should make you do it yourself.”

“Ok, we can summon it and you can show me how after I read the letter this bloody bird brought me.”

Hermione got out of the water and wandlessly summoned Harry’s Gameboy out of the water, and then his laptop out of the house while Harry read the note. Harry had a big smile on his face when he got through. “The note’s from Ginny. Mr. Weasley got the tickets! We’re going to the Quidditch World Cup!”

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 19 – The Quidditch World Cup

Harry lay in bed, having just fallen asleep three hours earlier, when his bloody alarm clock he should never have let Hermione talk him into buying went off. He briefly wondered if Hermione had made it impervious to damage as he considered throwing it out his window. Then he remembered why the alarm had gone off so bloody early. Today was the day of the Quidditch World Cup!

He struggled out of bed, remembering the last time he woke up this tired, just a few nights before. He'd been enjoying a dream involving Hermione when it was interrupted by an old man standing in front of him (right where Hermione had been) for a second before being cursed with some sort of green light and falling down dead. He'd woken up immediately, and his scar was prickling him lightly. He didn't mention it to anyone.

He took a quick shower and went downstairs to find Hermione (who'd spent the night in one of the extra bedrooms) and Sirius already downstairs eating.

"It's about time you got down here," said Hermione jokingly.

"We were about to tell Dobby to pop onto your bed," added Sirius as Harry joined them at the table for the scrambled eggs that had already been set for him. "You've got ten minutes to eat before we floo over to the Weasleys."

He ate as fast as he could, and before he knew it, he was falling forward from the Weasleys' fireplace, barely being caught in time by Sirius, who'd gone first, followed by Hermione, and finally Harry. Harry could swear he'd heard Mrs. Weasley's voice coming from the kitchen screaming, "Accio, Accio," over the twins' protest of whatever she was summoning from them.

"Hello everyone," said an enthusiastic Mr. Weasley, reaching out his hand toward Sirius, who immediately shook it.

"Thanks for getting the tickets," said Sirius.

“No problem whatsoever, Ludo Bagman, the head of the Magical Games and Sports department owed me a favor. We should be ready to leave within a few minutes.”

After what seemed like a short hike after all the training Harry and Hermione had been doing, the group, which had been joined by Amos and Cedric Diggory, arrived at the world cup via portkey. They were directed to their campsite, and before long Harry, Hermione, and Ginny were walking toward the tap with a kettle and saucepans while Mr. Weasley and Sirius were attempting to light a fire.

The trio saw many people, including a toddler who'd 'borrowed' his father's wand, three African wizards, and a group of American witches. Then everything seemed to go green as they entered the Irish section, where Seamus Finnigan called them.

“Aren't you Ron Weasley's little sister?” asked Seamus when the trio had joined him.

“Yes,” she said, “my name's Ginny.” She then shook his hand.

“Won't you be starting third year this September?”

“Actually,” said Ginny as she slightly blushed, “I'll be starting fourth year. I was double-promoted.”

“Really?” asked Seamus. “I'll bet Ron's not happy about being in the same classes as his little sister.”

“Well,” said Ginny, looking down, “We won't be in the same classes. He, er, well, didn't do so well on his finals, and McGonagall decided to hold him back a year.”

Seamus did his best not to look amused. “I'm, er, sorry to hear that. I guess he couldn't handle the classes without Hermione letting him copy assignments off of.”

“Exactly,” said Hermione. “Now he's got to learn to do things on his own.”

“Just how well did you do, Ginny?” asked Seamus. “Even Hermione here hasn’t been double-promoted.”

“Well,” blushed Hermione, “After my first year, Professor McGonagall offered to let me skip a year, but I decided I’d rather attend for the full seven years. Probably so I’d stay in class with Harry. After that, she hasn’t offered again.”

Harry stared at her, “And you never told anyone?”

“I didn’t see any need,” said Hermione smugly. “Since I wasn’t accepting the promotion, telling people about the offer would have only been bragging.”

After Seamus’ mother showed up and nearly made the trio take an unbreakable vow that they were supporting Ireland, they continued on their way, stopping when Ginny recognized a friend of hers. “Hello Luna,” she said. “I’d like to introduce you to a few friends of mine. Luna Lovegood, this is...”

“...Harry Potter and Hermione Granger,” the blonde, dreamy-eyed girl said. “You both look more fit than you did when school got out, especially you, Harry. Have you been working out?”

“Er,” said Harry, blushing, “a bit.”

“You should be careful to avoid any Minkdots while you’re exercising.”

“What?” asked Hermione.

“We’ve got to be going Luna. It was good seeing you,” said Ginny, leading Harry and Hermione away.

“What’s a Minkdot?” Hermione asked Ginny when they were out of earshot.

“Probably some nonexistent magical creature her father writes about in the Quibbler. She believes everything it says,” answered Ginny.

“Her father writes for the Quibbler?” asked Hermione.

“Actually, he owns the Quibbler,” said Ginny.

“What’s the Quibbler?” asked Harry.

Before he got his answer, they arrived at the tap, and noticed an old man in a long, flowery nightgown, talking about liking a healthy breeze around his privates, which caused both girls to turn red and start giggling.

On the way back, while carrying a lot of water, they ran across even more people they knew, such as Oliver Wood and Ernie MacMillan. They also ran across Cho Chang, the Ravenclaw seeker, who for some reason winked at Harry, causing Hermione to place herself in between the two of them.

When they finally got the water back to the campsite, they found that Sirius had managed to start the fire, and they relaxed for a little while, meeting several people from the ministry, including Ludo Bagman and Barty Crouch. Upon seeing Percy’s reaction to Mr. Crouch, Harry whispered to Hermione and the four youngest Weasleys, “Do you reckon Percy has left Penelope for Mr. Crouch yet?” causing his audience to burst out laughing. Before they knew it, they’d bought their souvenirs from the salesmen who had started popping up everywhere, including four pairs of omnioculars that Sirius had bought for himself, Harry, Hermione, and Ginny. It was now time to head for the stadium. When they arrived at their box, Harry noticed a house elf in one of the seats, and introduced himself. Her name was Winky, and she said she was saving a seat for her master, Mr. Crouch. She also said she knew Dobby, and was glad that he’d finally gotten a master who he was happy with, and that Dobby can’t say enough wonderful things about Harry and his friends.

As they continued to wait, Cornelius Fudge, the minister of magic showed up, and to Harry’s disgust and Percy’s envy, shook his hand and introduced him to his Bulgarian counterpart. At that moment Lucius Malfoy showed up and immediately began harassing Mr. Weasley for his lack of wealth. When his eyes fell on Hermione and his lip curled, he fell backwards, causing all of Harry’s party to smile slightly. Harry whispered to his girlfriend, “Did you do that?” Hermione’s cheeks went pink as she grinned and nodded.

Not long after that, the pre-game mascot shows began with a delightful leprechaun display, followed by what Hermione considered a vulgar veela dance, which she was happy to note, didn't affect Harry at all. When she noticed this, she immediately kissed him on the cheek, causing him to turn toward her. He smiled. "What was that for?"

"For being immune to the Veelas," she answered cheekily. "Look at Ron." He looked and saw that Ron was trying to jump off the bleachers toward them, being held back only by his father's hands. Harry also noticed that many of the men and boys were acting in a similar way.

"Why are they all acting like that?" asked Harry.

"Because most males can't resist their magic charms," answered Hermione.

"You're the only one who affects me like that," said Harry, causing Hermione to blush.

"Once this match is over, I am going to snog you so senseless, you'll forget who you are," Hermione promised.

"Maybe we should forget about the match, Mine" said Harry, grinning at her.

"No Hero," said an extremely red-faced Hermione, "first we watch the match, and then we snog."

"If you insist," said Harry, smiling.

The match was very exciting, and Hermione was amazed at how well Ireland's chasers worked together. "I don't know how they do it! Just how much does that team practice?" Harry was pleased with Hermione's newly acquired appreciation of quidditch. After the match ended with Ireland winning but Viktor Krum, Bulgaria's seeker, getting the snitch, they returned to the campsite, and Hermione kept her promise to Harry.

They were still snogging when Mr. Weasley interrupted them saying, “It’s time to go to bed,” and with a wink he added, “in separate tents,” causing the couple to turn red. They went to their tents without saying a word. After what seemed to Harry five minutes of sleep, Mr. Weasley was waking them up and telling them to get out of the tent and head for the forest. There were a bunch of wizards with black cloaks and masks terrorizing the muggles by floating them upside down in the air.

After they left Mr. Weasley and Sirius, Harry turned to Hermione and said, “I think we can help.”

“You’re right,” said Hermione, and they turned around and made their way back.

The leader of the group spotted Hermione and shouted “Mudblood,” in his muffled voice as he pointed his wand at her. Harry looked at the evil wizard, causing him to fall to the ground petrified.

He then turned his attention to Hermione, who was surprisingly still standing next to Harry. He said, “How...”

Hermione smiled, “I’m not sure if it was the necklace you gave me or the shield I put up that protected me.”

“I’m glad you’re wearing the necklace,” said Harry.

“Wotcher,” said Tonks, who was approaching. “I suppose I should tell you to leave, but you did a good job catching this Death Eater. Let’s see who it is.”

As she was walking toward the fallen masked Death Eater, Fudge showed up and said, “Well done! I can see you’re an Auror, but I’m afraid I don’t recall your name.”

“I’m Auror Tonks, sir. I just finished my training a few weeks ago.”

“Very well,” he said, “Let’s see who this Death Eater is,” and he pointed his wand at the mask, causing it to disappear. Fudge’s face went completely pale. “What! No, it can’t be! All those donations! He

was my guest!" Laying before them petrified was none other than Lucius Malfoy.

"Er, sir, it, well, looks like he might have been trying to use you, maybe," said Tonks timidly to her boss.

"Trying to use me," said the minister, taking on his normal pompous demeanor, "But of course I wasn't fooled. I was waiting for him to do something like this, but was gathering whatever information I could obtain until then."

"Of course, sir. I thought that must be what happened."

"Bind him, revive him, and then arrest him," said Fudge as he walked away proudly.

After Tonks had conjured ropes around Mr. Malfoy and taken his wand, Tonks whispered to Harry, "Er, could you revive him? Your spell seems too powerful for me to break."

At that moment, a terrifying shape filled the sky. A skull with a snake coming out of its mouth, which Harry had learned to be the Dark Mark, had appeared in the sky for the first time in nearly thirteen years, and the remaining Death Eaters fled. Many of the other wizards apparated.

"There you are!" said Sirius with a grin. "I had a feeling you'd want to join the fun."

"They caught Mr. Malfoy," said Tonks, causing Sirius' smile to broaden even more. "Of course Fudge thinks I did."

"That's probably good," said Sirius. "I caught Mr. Nott myself." He indicated a bound man being handled by another auror. "Can you handle this piece of trash?"

"After Harry revives him," said Tonks.

"To keep appearances," said Hermione, "you should be pointing your wand at Mr. Malfoy when Harry revives him."

"Good idea," said Tonks, now doing just that.

Harry revived Lucius just before Sirius apparated himself and Harry to the scene under the Dark Mark, where Mr. Weasley was shouting, "That's my son!" and running to protect Ron from the other wizards.

Sirius whispered to Harry, "I'll be right back. I'm just getting Hermione."

Harry silently watched the scene unfold as Ron described hearing someone nearby conjure the mark. He'd just felt Hermione take his hand as he recognized the wand they'd found with Winky the house elf was, and checked his pocket to be sure. "That's my wand!" he shouted at the gathered witches and wizards.

"Your wand?" said Ludo Bagman.

"Yes," said Harry. "I think it must have fallen out of my pocket in all the commotion when I was trying to escape."

Harry watched as they proved that the brother to Voldemort's wand had been used to conjure his mark. Mr. Weasley then made sure Harry got his wand back. Harry and Hermione were appalled when Mr. Crouch sacked Winky. Harry spoke up while Winky was crying. "Sir, since you're sacking Winky, then may I assume you wouldn't mind if I hired her?"

"What, no, I suppose not, if you really want this worthless elf."

"Thank you," said Harry calmly. "I could use another elf at my manor."

"Harry Potter sir, you, you is wanting to hire Winky?" asked the heartbroken elf.

Harry squatted down beside her and gently said, "Yes Winky. As soon as Mr. Crouch releases you, come to Potter Manor. Do you know where that is?"

"Y-Yes, Winky is knowing where Potter Manor is," she said, sounding a bit less sad, "Winky is going there as soon as Master is releasing Winky."

"Then I look forward to seeing you soon," said Harry. Then Mr. Weasley, Sirius, Ron, Hermione, and Harry all went back to their tents.

"That was a good thing you just did, Harry," said Mr. Weasley as they walked.

"Yes it was," said Hermione, who had one arm around his waist as they were walking. "And you've just earned a snogging session you'll never forget."

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 20 – Slaves and Games**

After only a few hours of sleep, Harry's group portkeyed near the Burrow, and then after bidding their goodbyes to the Weasleys, Sirius side-along apparated Hermione to Potter Manor, returning a minute later to take Harry.

When Harry arrived, he was greeted by Dobby, who immediately hugged Harry. "I is knowing Harry Potter is a great wizard for freeing Dobby and hiring him, but now Harry Potter is taking in Dobby's friend Winky."

At this moment Harry noticed Winky timidly standing in a corner, wearing a neat little skirt and blouse with a matching blue hat, which had holes in it for her large ears. "Hello Dobby," Harry said as Dobby released him. He then walked up to the other elf and squatted down before her. "Hello Winky."

"H-Hello Harry Potter sir. W-Winky is doing what Harry Potter is saying, coming to Potter Manor after Master Crouch, Master..." At this moment Winky started crying and Hermione, who'd been watching the exchange, squatted down next to Harry and hugged Winky.

"It's all right, Winky," she said, "It wasn't your fault."

"I is a bad elf. I is disgraced," Winky said, sobbing.

"You are not a bad elf, and Mr. Crouch is the disgrace," said Sirius. "If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals. Based off of how he treated you Winky, Barty Crouch is not a good man."

"I is not speaking ill of master," said Winky defensively.

"You don't have to speak ill of Mr. Crouch," said Harry. "Just agree to work for me."

Winky's eyes went wide as a smile came across her face. "You, you is still wanting to hire Winky?" she said hopefully.

“Of course I do,” said Harry. “Dobby is getting one Galleon a week, with one day off per month. Is that acceptable for you.”

Winky lowered her head and began crying again. “Oh no, sir. Dobby may be wanting wages,” she shot a glare at the other elf, whose ears lowered, “but Winky isn’t accepting wages or days off.”

“But you’ve got to,” said Hermione, “It’s only fair!”

“Then Winky is leaving. Winky is properly ashamed to take wages. Winky would rather die...”

“Fine,” said Harry. “If that’s how you feel about it, you can work here without wages.” Hermione gave Harry a sharp glare. “But if you change your mind, you can come to me and ask for wages.”

Winky smiled slightly. “I is accepting those terms, but I is not changing my mind about wages.”

“Very well,” said Harry. They then shook hands, sealing the magical agreement as their hands glowed for a second.

Hermione then stormed off toward the fireplace without saying a word. Harry called out, “Hermione,” but it was too late. She’d already flooed away. Harry grabbed some floo powder, stepped into his fireplace, threw the powder down, and shouted, “Granger residence!” while Sirius watched silently.

When Harry arrived at Hermione’s house, he distinctly heard an upstairs door slam. He looked around to see Adam and Marissa Granger looking at him with bewildered expressions on their faces. He took a deep breath. “Hello Adam, Marissa.”

“Er, Hello Harry,” said Adam. “What’s wrong with Hermione. She said something about you owning slaves and stormed off.”

“It was the only thing I could do, sir. At the world cup, we saw a house elf named Winky get sacked for no good reason, and we saw how heartbroken she was. I told Winky she could come to Potter Manor for a job. She showed up this morning and I offered her the same wages I pay Dobby, but Winky refused. She said she’d leave unless I

let her work for nothing, and well, I agreed to let her, er, work for nothing. It was either that or let her live on the street. Hermione stormed off after that without saying a word, and flooed here." He then looked at Hermione's parents. "You don't think I should've sent Winky away, do you?"

"Well," said Mrs. Granger, "It's sometimes hard for us to understand the ways of the wizarding world, but we know you were only trying to help Winky. We're sure Hermione will realize that soon."

"Thanks. Can I go upstairs and talk to her?"

"Yes, Harry. I'm sure you heard her slam her door when you arrived," said Adam.

Harry then marched straight up the stairs to Hermione's room and knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" came Hermione's voice from the other side. It sounded to Harry like she was crying.

"It's me, Harry."

"Go away!"

"I'm not leaving until you talk to me," he said firmly.

"I have nothing to say to you, slave driver!" she shouted.

"Mine, will you at least let me explain?"

"Don't call me that!"

"Are you trying to end our relationship without even giving me a chance to explain myself? I thought it meant more to you, that I meant more to you, than that. I thought you loved me. I guess I was wrong."

"I do love you, but what you did was wrong, and I can't have a boyfriend who owns slaves!"

“Please open the door so I can talk to you properly, Hermione. I love you and I don’t want to lose you.”

“Fine!” she said as her door opened, revealing a red-faced girl with tears stains running down her cheeks, glaring at the boy she’d been snogging passionately just the day before.

He stepped in and tried to take her hands in his, but she pulled back. “Hermione,” he said softly. “You heard what Winky said. I don’t like having her work for nothing any more than you do, but if I didn’t agree, she’d have run off, and who knows what would have become of her. I was only trying to be nice to her.” When Hermione didn’t say anything for a few seconds, Harry continued. “You’re a lot more important to me than Winky. If you feel that strongly about it, I’ll go home right now and give her clothes. Of course, she’ll be even more heartbroken and probably kill herself, but if that’s what you want...”

Hermione sighed, “I don’t want Winky to kill herself. I just want her free! Slavery is wrong.”

Harry spoke softly to his girlfriend. “I know slavery is wrong, but I don’t see a choice if I want to help Winky. You heard me tell her that she can ask for wages any time she wants. It seems that for some reason most elves want to be slaves, so right now I think the best thing to do is to treat her with kindness and respect instead of the way they’re usually treated. Maybe one day things will be different and Winky will be happy to get wages, but until then, at least she can be happy. I don’t want to be her master, but that seems the only way to be her friend.”

Hermione seemed to slowly calm down as Harry spoke. “I understand, Harry. Maybe we can find a way to work for house elf rights, but you’re probably right about this being the only way to help Winky right now. I’m sorry I overreacted, Hero,” she said with a small grin.

“Does that mean I can call you Mine?” he responded, looking deep into her brown eyes.

She smiled. “Yes Harry, you can call me yours.”

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A few minutes later, they both came walking hand-in-hand down the stairs. Mrs. Granger said with a slight smile, “You’re holding hands. Does that mean you’ve settled your disagreement?”

“Yes, mum,” said Hermione with her head hung down. “I overreacted to something.”

“I see,” said Marissa. “I’m just glad he followed you. I’d hate for you two to break up over a simple misunderstanding.”

“So would I, Mum. I’ve already apologized to Harry, so can we please drop it. Harry and I have to get back to our training.”

Adam chuckled, “Alright, we’ll drop it. But when you’re done, we’d like Harry to come over for lunch and stay until after supper. It’s been a while since we’ve had him over.”

“Alright,” said Harry, smiling. “Thanks!”

“Oh, by the way, while you were gone, Professor Lupin went shopping with us in Diagon Alley. We picked up all your books and supplies, while Remus did the same for Harry.”

“That was nice of him,” said Harry. “I hope you had a good time.”

“Yes we did,” said Adam. “He told us that Hermione was right about you doing better in his class. He also said that you’ve both been doing really well in your training, and that he thinks you can already defend yourselves against most wizards twice your age.” Harry and Hermione both blushed at this statement. “We just wanted to say we’re proud of both of you, and to keep up the good work.”

Both Harry and Hermione quietly said, “Thanks.”

They flooded back to the manor to find Sirius and Remus both waiting for them. “So, Hermione, Harry, have you settled whatever the problem was?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “It was just a misunderstanding. Can we have some breakfast before training? I’m starving!”

Winky immediately popped up to take their order. "What is Master Potter and Miss Granger wanting?"

"Winky," said Harry softly, "I'd like waffles covered in strawberries and whipped cream. By the way, would you mind calling me 'Harry' instead of 'Master?'"

"If-If mas-Harry is preferring not to acknowledge that he's Winky's master, then..."

"It's not that, Winky! I'm proud to have you here. I'm just not comfortable being called anybody's master."

"Very well, H-Harry," said Winky. "And what is Miss Granger wanting?"

"Oh, I'll take the same as Harry."

As soon as Winky left, Sirius handed Harry the Daily Prophet. "I thought you might want to take a look at this."

Harry read the article out loud for Hermione's benefit.

"Minister Fudge Foils Death Eater Attack at Quidditch World Cup" Hermione rolled her eyes at this statement. Harry continued.

"Last night, Death Eaters attacked at the celebrations following the Quidditch World Cup (for more on the actual game, see page 6). However, their leader, Lucius Malfoy, was apprehended almost immediately by Nymphadora Tonks, Auror and personal friend of Cornelius Fudge whom he'd warned earlier to be prepared for an attack. Her cousin, Sirius Black, whom Fudge had dropped all the charges that his predecessor had wrongfully placed on Black, sentencing him to Azkaban for life without a trial, apprehended another Death Eater involved in the attack. Minister Fudge commented on the attack, "I'd suspected Lucius Malfoy for quite some time, so I invited him to join me at the World Cup to lull him into a false sense of security, so that I could catch him in the act..."

Harry laughed, "Fudge is really laying it on thick, isn't he. He's the 'Great Hero' who saved the day. Well, better him than me."

"I wonder how Tonks feels about having her first name in the paper," said Lupin.

"You seem to wonder a lot about Tonks, don't you Moony?" said Sirius, causing Remus to blush.

"I'm way too old for her. Besides, my furry little problem would make it too difficult."

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After breakfast and another grueling three hours of training, Harry went to his personal shower connected to his bedroom so he could clean up while Hermione did the same in one of the spare bathrooms. He thought about how much he'd miss this bedroom when he went back to Hogwarts in less than a week. He also realized something else. He wasn't looking forward to Hogwarts the way he used to when he was living with the Dursleys. During his first year at the wizarding school, he'd come to think of Hogwarts as home, but now he didn't anymore. He still liked Hogwarts, but this manor was now his home, and he'd have to leave it for months. He realized that he'd, for the first time in his life, be homesick for someplace besides Hogwarts.

At the same time, Hermione was thinking of her mother's words, "I'd hate for you two to break up over a simple misunderstanding," as well as Ginny's words, "I won't come between you two, but if you ever break up, I will go after him." Hermione realized that she had very nearly handed Harry over to Ginny. If Harry hadn't followed her, Ginny would have found him heartbroken on the Hogwarts express, and immediately started comforting him. Hermione sighed as she realized that even if Ginny didn't go after Harry, there were tons of girls who would. Hermione resolved to not overreact anymore. If they have a disagreement, they'll talk it through. That didn't mean she'd let Harry get away with anything he wanted, but she would just make sure that she always gave him a chance to explain himself before she stormed off angrily. She would not risk losing Harry over stupidity.

She came downstairs to find Harry already waiting for her, playing something on his Gameboy. He looked up, pressed a button on his Gameboy, and said, "Hi, Hermione, you look nice."

She blushed, “I, er, transfigured my clothes to something I thought looked nicer.”

“They do look nice,” said Harry, “but then you always do.”

She blushed more as she walked up and sat on Harry’s lap, draping her arms around his neck. “I just wanted to thank you for coming after me when I stormed off this morning. I was very foolish and I could have lost you. I promise that I won’t act like that again. I’ll at least give you a chance to explain yourself before I storm off. I don’t want to lose you over a stupid misunderstanding.”

“Mine,” said Harry, “You already apologized. How could I not have followed you? How would I live without you?”

“Th-There are plenty of other girls at Hogwarts that would be glad to help you try.”

Harry looked at her like she was nutters. “That’s rubbish. They’re just curious about ‘The Boy Who Lived.’ They don’t really want to be my girlfriend. And I certainly don’t want to be their boyfriend. I’m in love with you!”

Her cheeks went pink. “I’m in love with you, too, and I’m glad you feel the same, but it’s not rubbish. I could name a girl who has told me in no uncertain terms that if we ever broke up, she’d love to take my place.”

Harry smiled, “Well, then I guess that girl’s gonna be disappointed.”

A few minutes later, Harry and Hermione flooed back to the Granger residence to spend the afternoon there. “Good afternoon kids,” said Mr. Granger when they stepped out of the fireplace. “How was your workout?”

“Exhausting,” said Harry. “But somehow satisfying.”

“I know what you mean,” said Hermione. “It does feel good to finish a workout.”

"Anyway," said Marissa Granger, "I'll bet you've worked up an appetite."

After a satisfying lunch, Harry watched an action movie with the Grangers, and then they all headed for the swimming pool where they had a game of water volleyball that was the teenagers against the adults. Hermione's mother made some comments on how Harry had filled out since they began working out that caused both Harry and Hermione to blush. After Harry and Hermione won easily, Adam jokingly said, "Are you two sure you weren't using some magic to win?"

Harry chuckled, "If we had, there'd be an owl flying here right now telling us we'd performed illegal magic. I remember when Dobby got me that warning for illegal magic he'd performed at my house. The Dursleys had a fit! That's when they locked me in my room for the summer."

"I still don't understand why Dumbledore would leave you with those people," said Marissa.

"He felt it was 'for the greater good' to leave Harry with those monsters!" said Hermione. "He also felt it was 'for the greater good' to leave Harry ignorant of and therefore untrained for his destiny. You'd be amazed at how much more magically powerful Harry has become now that he's started training!"

"You've gotten powerful yourself," Harry interjected, causing Hermione to blush.

"My point is that if he'd been trained properly his whole life and not held back by Dumbledore's plan, he'd already be unstoppable! I mean after just a month of training, he's already caught a d...never mind." She and Harry both put their heads down as Hermione covered her face with her hands.

"Caught what?" said a concerned Adam.

"A Death Eater," answered Harry, "Lucius Malfoy."

"Malfoy?" asked Mrs. Granger. "Is he related to that..."

“He’s Draco’s father,” said Harry, “He’s also the man that gave Ginny Weasley Riddle’s diary, which possessed her. He’s the reason Hermione and several other muggleborns were petrified in second year. Of course, he was hoping they’d be killed. Anyway, there was an attack at the world cup, and he tried to curse Hermione, and I, er...”

“Bravely defended me like the hero you are!” said Hermione proudly.

“Are you alright, honey,” asked Marissa.

“Yes mum, I was wearing the protection charms Harry gave me, plus I put up my own shield. The curse didn’t affect me, but the moment Malfoy tried to curse me, Harry petrified him! I guess that was fitting. Harry was amazing! Malfoy still doesn’t really know what hit him. He thinks Tonks got him from behind. That’s also what’s in the paper.”

“You could have done the same thing Hermione, and you know it,” said Harry.

She smiled, “Possibly, but only because I’ve been training with you. They don’t even teach that kind of magic in auror training.”

“It’s too bad no one but Sirius caught anybody else,” said Harry.

“Sirius caught someone too?” said Adam, clearly interested. “Why don’t you tell us exactly what happened?”

They started the story with Minister Fudge having Lucius Malfoy as his guest, and ended with the article in the newspaper, leaving nothing out (except for their snogging).

When they were finished, Mr. Granger said, “Wow. I didn’t know how dangerous your world is. I don’t suppose I could get you to leave it, so I’m glad you’re training as best you can.”

“It’s usually not that dangerous, Adam, but when things like this happen, it’s good to be prepared,” said Harry. “Besides, terrorism happens in the muggle world at least as often as in the wizarding world.”

"Unfortunately, I think you're right about that, Harry. I don't suppose there's anywhere you can go to avoid it," said Mrs. Granger with a worried expression on her face.

"Anyway, I'm sure you and Hermione want some time alone before dinner," said Adam. "Just keep your door open."

The young couple went up to Hermione's room to find her new school books stacked neatly on her desk near her laptop. She said, "I'll put these books on our network tomorrow at your house." Then her eyes brightened with an idea. "Did you bring your Gameboy?"

"Er, yeah," said Harry. "I put it in my pocket before we left, why?"

"Do you have your Mario Kart game?"

"Yes, that's what I was playing."

Hermione then opened a drawer in her desk and produced her own purple Game Boy Advance SP. I got my parents to buy me one last week, along with my copy of that game. I charmed my Game Boy at your house a few days ago, along with this." She then produced two ends of a cord for connecting the two Game Boys. "I charmed this to connect the two magically and wirelessly. We can play together from absolutely anywhere on the planet. Just plug this into yours and we'll be able to play against each other." She handed him one of the ends and plugged the other into her machine.

Harry pulled his system out of his pocket. As he was plugging the piece into his machine, he asked, "How come you didn't tell me about this until now?"

"I wanted to practice playing before I challenged you," she said with a smirk. At that moment, Harry knew he was in trouble.

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 21 – Flying High

The next day Harry woke up at seven with his Game Boy in his lap, as his alarm clock played a song that he just decided he hated. He thought about chucking the cd out the window, but then remembered that he'd made all his cds impervious to damage anyway. He settled on turning off the alarm. He fumbled his way to the shower as he felt the affects of sleep deprivation that the world cup had afforded him.

Hermione showed up at eight with a few of her textbooks in hand. She said, "I didn't see the point of bringing the books that you already have. I'll put them on the network before I go home today. For now, I guess it's time for more training."

At that moment, Hedwig flew into the house carrying a letter. Harry took the letter and went back to the kitchen to grab a piece of bacon for her before the elves cleared off the table. It was too late. As Hedwig was looking expectantly and impatiently at Harry, he called out, "Winky!" and the elf appeared.

"Yes Harry," she said.

"Is there any bacon left so I can give Hedwig some?" Harry asked.

"Yes Harry! I is getting it now!" With that she disappeared, reappearing a few seconds later with a piece of bacon, which Harry immediately gave to Hedwig, who took it and flew to one of the empty rooms she seemed to have claimed for herself.

Harry looked at the letter and said, "Hermione, this is from Fred and George. It says,

Harry and Hermione,

From what our father tells us, you have learned how to charm muggle devices, such as cop-muters, to work at Hogwarts. Is this true? If it is, we have a business proposition to make. You charm muggle devices for other students (for a fee of course). We advertise and handle the business aspect of it (advertising, etc.) and then give you the devices to charm. We then split the profits evenly.

Sincerely,  
Fred and George”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. Harry sighed, “Well, what do you think?”

“Well,” said Hermione, “When people see our laptops and Gameboys, they’ll probably be bugging us to charm their stuff anyway. With this business deal, we won’t have to deal with the students, just the muggle devices. And since they’ll have to pay, it’ll be less people than if we did it for free. However, I do think that we should get more profits than the twins, since it’s your mum’s research that makes it possible. We should demand two-thirds of the profits.”

“Actually,” said Harry, “We should ask for three-fourths, and then they’ll negotiate down to two-thirds. I would like it if you did the charms, though. You’re better at it than me, and I certainly don’t need the money.”

“What if it gets to be too much work?” asked Hermione. “I don’t want to get behind in my studies.”

“If it gets to be too much,” suggested Harry, “we can sell the twins the power charms, which would probably be the biggest seller.”

Hermione smiled, “If it really does get that popular, we could charge the twins a lot for that spell.”

“Ok, then it’s settled. I’ll write the letter.” Harry then got a ballpoint pen and paper (He used them at his house because he didn’t really like using a quill with ink and parchment). He wrote,

“Fred and George,

It is true that we can charm any muggle electronic devices, such as our computers, to work at Hogwarts. We would be glad to go into business with you, but we feel that we should get three-fourths of the profits. Hermione will be doing the majority of the spellwork. We promise not to charm anybody’s devices for free. If it becomes too time consuming, we’ll consider selling you the spells so you can

charm the devices yourself. Let us know what you think of our proposition.

Sincerely,

Harry and Hermione"

Harry called Hedwig, who reluctantly stuck her leg out for Harry to attach the letter to. "Take this over to Fred and George, and then wait for their reply, girl." She then flew off out the window.

"Aren't you two ready for training yet," came Lupin's voice from behind them.

"We are now," said Hermione, as they turned around and headed toward their torture chamber.

Three and a half hours later, while they were eating lunch, Sirius said, "We're going to take a little trip today. Hermione, I already cleared it with your folks."

"Really?" said Hermione, "Where?"

"It's a surprise," said Lupin.

"Come on guys," said Harry, but before he could continue, Hedwig flew to the table and landed on Harry's shoulder. Harry saw a piece of parchment tied to her leg, so he took it and gave her a bit of his lunch. He then patted her feathers and said, "Thanks, Hedwig."

The letter said,

"Harry and Hermione,

We agree that you'll probably deserve more profit than us, since it's your spells, but three-fourths is a bit too much. The most we can give you is two-thirds. We hope this deal is acceptable. Once we have enough Galleons, we'd be glad to purchase the spells from you. Hopefully we'll be able to do that by the end of the school year. We won't demand that Hedwig keeps flying back and forth between us

again today. We'll see you on the train in a few days and finalize our agreement if you agree to our terms.

Hopefully your partners,

Fred and George"

"See Hermione," said Harry smiling, "I knew they'd negotiate down."

"You were right," said Hermione, beaming back at her boyfriend. "I guess we've just gone into business with the Weasley twins. Oh Sirius?"

"Yes," said Sirius, who'd been chatting with Lupin and not paying attention to Harry and Hermione's conversation.

"Don't show anyone how to charm the muggle devices like your laptop. If anyone asks, send them to Fred and George. We're going into business with them."

"Really," said Sirius, grinning from ear to ear. "What if the teachers don't want to do business with students?"

"Then I'd suggest you talk to Fred and George to find out how much they're going to charge, and maybe make an agreement that says you sell to teachers only and they sell to students only," suggested Hermione.

"Hmm," said Sirius, scratching his chin. "Maybe I will. Anyway, we're going to apparate someplace, and I want to bring brooms for all of us."

"All right," said Harry hesitantly. "I still wish I knew where we were going."

"You'll like it," said Lupin, "we promise."

They went outside to the broom closet near the quidditch pitch, and took out the two firebolts and two cleansweeps. Then Sirius apparated with Harry while Lupin apparated with Hermione.

They appeared in the middle of a forest clearing, and several magical animals, such as unicorns, ran away when they arrived. Hermione asked, "Where are we?" but Sirius ignored her and pulled out what appeared to be a whistle. After Sirius blew into it, making no sound audible to the human ear, he finally answered Hermione's question. "We're in a magical forest that's about a thousand kilometers south of Hogwarts."

"Why are we here," asked Harry. "Are we going to do some training on our brooms?"

"Yes we will," said Lupin, "but first we'd like to say hello to..."

"BUCKBEAK!" exclaimed both Harry and Hermione as the hippogriff fugitive flew down near them. They both bowed to him immediately, and he bowed his head back, allowing them to approach.

"Hello, Beaky," said Hermione as she stroked his neck, "How are you doing?"

"Hey Buckbeak," said Harry as he softly patted the hippogriff's head. "Do you mind if I ride you?"

Buckbeak shook his head, seemingly answering Harry's question, so Harry climbed aboard his back, and held out his hand to Hermione.

"Er, no I don't think I will," she said, appearing nervous.

"Come on Hermione," said Harry, "It's a lot of fun! Please?" he said, giving her a pleading look that she could never resist.

"Oh, all right," she said, and Harry helped her get settled behind him, and then Buckbeak took off into the air. Hermione was holding tightly to Harry and screaming as loud as she could (causing Harry an earache) at first, but then as she got used to it, she began enjoying herself, and even let go of Harry for a few seconds while she held out her arms like they were wings of an airplane.

While she was doing that, she heard Sirius' voice say, "That a girl!" which startled her, causing her to grab Harry's waist again. She

turned to see Moony and Padfoot flying right behind them on their brooms.

When Hermione looked shocked, Lupin said with a smile on his face, "You didn't expect us to let you go off unsupervised, did you?"

Sirius laughed, "What kind of chaperones would we be?" Harry joined in the laughter.

After a few minutes of that, everyone returned back to the clearing, and then Sirius and Remus started chasing Harry and Hermione on broomsticks through the forest. It was actually a lot of fun. For the first round, Harry and Hermione used the firebolts while the others used the cleansweeps. After the young couple successfully mastered that, they switched brooms, which made it a lot more difficult to escape the Marauders. After a few enjoyable hours of that, they said goodbye to Buckbeak and apparated back to Potter Manor. Dobby made dinner while they cleaned up. Hermione said she'd scan the schoolbooks into the computer after dinner.

While they were eating, Hermione mentioned, "I think I've gotten fairly good at flying. I was thinking of trying out for quidditch this year."

Harry looked ecstatic. "That would be great!" he shouted.

Both Sirius and Remus put their heads down.

Hermione looked uncertain, "Er, I know I'm not as good as Harry, but I thought I might..."

"It's not that," said Sirius, "You actually have gotten very good at flying this summer, and you might even have made the team, but you see, er, this year you're not having quidditch."

"WHAT?" shouted Harry, while Hermione looked perplexed. "How can they not have quidditch?" he demanded.

"Well," said Lupin, "we're not allowed to say..."

"We might as well tell them," said Sirius, "or Harry might refuse to go to school. You can't tell anyone else until Dumbledore makes the

announcement.” The two teens nodded. “Have either of you ever heard of the Tri-Wizard Tournament?”

## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 22 – Announcements

The next few days passed quickly with training, getting ahead in classes, games (video games as well as the many other activities Potter Manor was equipped for), and of course, snogging. They did manage to visit Buckbeak one more time the day before school began. Before they knew it, Harry and Hermione were sitting in a compartment of the Hogwarts Express, competing against each other in yet another game of Mario Kart. Harry was improving, and was not as easily beaten by Hermione anymore. The door to their compartment opened and Hermione immediately paused the game to look at who had opened the door. She smiled as she said, “Hello Fred, George. How are you.”

“Hi Gred, Forge,” said Harry with a grin.

“We’re both fine,” said Fred.

“But we do want to know,” said George.

“If you accept our offer of two-thirds of the profits,” said Fred.

Harry smiled broadly and said, “Yes. You handle the marketing and bookkeeping...”

“And we’ll charm the devices,” finished Hermione.

“That’s good news,” said George.

“Hopefully, we’ll make enough money to develop our own joke products,” said Fred.

“Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes,” said George proudly.

“Are those muggle devices in your hands?” asked Fred, now eying their Game Boys.

“Yes,” said Hermione. “These are portable muggle video game systems called “Game Boy Advances. Harry and I are playing a racing game called Mario Kart against each other.”

“How are you playing each other?” asked George.

“There’s no cord attaching those Game Boy Advances,” said Fred.

Hermione sighed, “Honestly. There are some muggle devices that do work together without being attached by a cord. However, you are right about these. Muggles need to use a cord with them, but I charmed them so they don’t need it. If people get those, they need to know not to let muggles see them competing without the cord.”

“Wicked,” said George. “Do you mind if we try out the products?”

“I guess not,” said Harry, who’d let Hermione explain the Game Boys, “I was probably going to lose anyway.”

Fred and George took seats across from Harry and Hermione, while Hermione explained how to play the game. Fred and George were already absorbed in their competition when Ginny walked into their compartment. She said, “Do you mind if I join you?”

“Not at all, Ginny,” said Hermione. Ginny took a seat next to Hermione (Harry was against the window on Hermione’s other side). Hermione then asked, “I’m surprised Ron’s not with you.”

Ginny sighed, “Oh that git,” causing her brothers to chuckle while still intently playing their game. “He said, ‘I’m not spending the train ride with that show off!’ and went to find a seat somewhere else,” Ginny said with a grin. “Good riddance!” Ginny then noticed that Fred and George were absorbed in some weird devices she’d never seen before. “What are Fred and George doing?”

“They’re playing a muggle video game,” said Harry.

“Oh,” said Ginny, “Don’t those need ekle-tricity?”

“Normally they do require electricity,” said Hermione patiently, “But those are charmed to work on magic instead.”

“Wow,” said Ginny, “Isn’t that illegal?”

“No,” said Harry, “We asked your dad. He said that as long as they’re not doing anything out of the ordinary, it’s not illegal. They’re functioning the same as always, so if a muggle used them they wouldn’t notice the difference.”

“Except that the battery never runs out,” pointed out Hermione, “But the only way they’d find that out is if they stole it.”

“Cool,” said Ginny. “Can you charm any muggle device to do that?”

“Absolutely,” said Hermione.

“For the right price,” added Fred and George together (while still playing their game).

“What do they mean?” asked Ginny.

“You see,” said Hermione, “We’ve gone into business with them and, er, promised not to charm any muggle devices for anyone unless they go through Fred and George first and settle on a price.”

“The twins will give us the devices to charm, so if you want something charmed, you’ll have to go through them.”

The redhead girl smiled to herself, “I think I can blackmail them into letting me get things charmed for free.”

At that moment, the door opened yet again, and this time it was an unwelcome guest. Despite the fact that his father was in Azkaban, Draco was still strutting around proudly with his two goons at his side, although Harry noticed that Draco’s smile didn’t reach his eyes.

“What do you want, Draco?” Harry spit out.

“I wanted to know if you were entering. I’ll bet someone like you couldn’t resist the chance to show off!”

“Didn’t your jailbird father tell you the new rules?” asked Hermione.

“I wasn’t talking to you, mudblood! How dare you insult my father,” he snapped back, and then turned back to Harry. “What new rules?”

Harry smirked at Draco, "Didn't you know? They're only allowing people seventeen or older in the tournament, so I can't enter, and no matter how much your Death Eater Dad has bribed the ministry with, you can't either."

Draco seemed to pale slightly at the thought of Harry and Hermione knowing something he didn't, but still kept the same expression as he pulled out his wand, saying, "How dare you call my father a, whaaaa...ouch!" At that moment, his feet came forward toward Harry as if summoned and Draco fell on his backside. Everyone in the compartment (except Crabbe and Goyle) started laughing at Draco as he got up and left quickly, followed by his 'bodyguards.' Hermione turned to look Harry in the eye questioningly. He winked at her, causing an even bigger smile to appear on her face than was already there. She kissed him quickly, er well she didn't think it was long enough anyway, as Ginny turned her head and the twins focused their attention back on the game, which they'd paused to laugh properly at Draco.

"Already at it," said Ron loudly, who'd just walked up from the hallway.

"It's really none of your business," snapped Hermione, who was clearly annoyed at being interrupted while kissing her boyfriend.

"Why don't you go find someone to kiss instead of complaining about Harry and Hermione?" asked Ginny with a smirk. "I'm sure there's a first year boy somewhere on this train who'll have you!"

The twins has to pause their game again as they joined in the laughter at that statement. Ron's face turned a shade of purple that reminded Harry of his Uncle Vernon. He tried to pull out his wand, but found that it was stuck in his pocket. He kept pulling on it, eventually with both hands, but it wouldn't budge. He was getting more and more frustrated while the others were laughing harder and harder at him struggling. He finally turned around and stormed off. Soon after the laughter died down, Harry looked over at Hermione, who winked at him, causing him to let out a slight chuckle. At that moment, Neville appeared in the doorway.

He said, "I was sitting with Ron, but he went to the bathroom a little while ago, and since he came back, for some reason he's been really upset. I was wondering if I could join you guys?"

"Sure Neville," said Harry. Neville sat next to the twins, right across from Ginny. Hermione noticed that every few seconds, he'd glance at Ginny and slightly blush.

"So," said Neville, ending the silence that started when he sat down, "What are Fred and George doing?"

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After the rest of the enjoyable trip, in which George finally won so they gave the Game Boys back to their owners, they found themselves soaking wet in the Great Hall. They all laughed when Peeves got Ron in the head with a water balloon. Harry and Hermione had noticed it beforehand and could have stopped it, but they couldn't think of one good reason to do so.

Before they sat down, Hermione pulled her wand out and verbally performed the drying charm on Harry, herself, Fred, George, and Ginny. Afterwards she whispered into Harry's ear, "I almost did that without my wand. It's going to be difficult acting like we need them, and even harder to remember to say the spells."

Harry whispered back, "I know, it'll be like pretending to be a first year again."

She chuckled softly at that statement, and then Fred said, "Oy, if you two must whisper sweet nothings in each other's ears, do it without making noise. The sorting's started. We're trying to hear the names of our new potential customers."

When the sorting was over, the Headmaster made the simple announcement, "Tuck in."

Soon after the feast had started, Nearly Headless Nick showed up, talking about how Peeves had been terrorizing the house elves, gaining Hermione's attention. "There are house elves here at Hogwarts?" she asked.

“More than anywhere else in Europe I believe,” said Sir Nicolas.

“I, er, I don’t suppose they get wages here, do they?” asked Hermione timidly.

“Of course not,” said Nick.

“But, but they’re happy here, aren’t they? I mean, they’re not mistreated, are they?”

“Aside from when Peeves is terrorizing them, I’d say they’re the happiest elves I’ve ever seen. Professor Dumbledore always praises their work, and I’ve never yet heard of him punishing an elf.”

“Well, that’s good,” said Hermione, as she took another bite of her food.

Harry smiled at her, causing her cheeks to go a little pink. “You handled that very well,” he said.

“What did you expect me to do, refuse to eat?”

They continued the meal amiably, until the dishes were cleared and the Headmaster walked up the podium to make his announcements.

“Welcome to another year at Hogwarts. First of all, Mr. Filch, the caretaker, has asked me to announce that smiling in the hallways is no longer permitted,” Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eyes. Filch gave him a quick glare. Dumbledore continued, “I’m joking, of course, but Mr. Filch did ask me to remind you that magic is forbidden in the hallways, and that the Forbidden Forest is, well, forbidden to all students. He has also added Screaming Yo-Yos, Fanged Frisbees, and Ever-Bashing Boomerangs to the list of forbidden objects within the castle. If you’re interested in the full list, which comprises some four hundred and thirty-seven items, I believe, it is inside Mr. Filch’s office.” He then motioned toward the staff table. “As you may have noticed, there are three new members of staff here. Professor Brooks will be teaching History of Magic.” He motioned to a petite woman with tan skin, brown eyes, and long brown hair. She appeared to be in her mid-twenties, and was very attractive. About half of the

younger boys blushed when she waved her hand. “Professor Figg will be teaching Muggle Studies.”

Harry couldn’t believe his eyes as he recognized the grizzled gray hair, although now instead of a hairnet she was wearing a pointed hat. He whispered to Hermione, “That’s Mrs. Figg! The lady with all the cats who lived on Privit Drive that used to baby-sit me!”

Hermione gasped. She then whispered, “I’ll bet Dumbledore placed her there to spy on you. Now that you don’t live there, she had no reason to stay.”

Dumbledore continued, “And finally, as the new Head of Slytherin House and Potions Master, is Professor Black, recently cleared of all charges.”

“What?” came the sound of several surprised students from the Slytherin table.

“Isn’t he Harry Potter’s guardian?” came the sneering voice of Draco Malfoy.

“Yes he is, quite right Mr. Malfoy, although I regret to inform you that I must take five points from Slytherin for your speaking out of turn,” said Dumbledore. “I’m sure that Professor Black will not show favoritism toward Mr. Potter in the manner that Professor Snape has shown favoritism toward Slytherin House and you in particular in the past.”

Harry couldn’t help but chuckle as he saw Sirius, sitting next to Remus, smiling brightly. “Did you see the look on Draco’s face?” Harry whispered to his neighbors, causing them all to chuckle quietly.

Dumbledore continued, “It is also my painful duty to inform you that the Inter-House Quidditch Cup will not take place this year.” Harry hid his grin as he looked around at Fred and George, his fellow members of the Quidditch team. They were mouthing soundlessly at Dumbledore, apparently too appalled to speak. Dumbledore went on, “This is due to an event that will be starting in October, and continuing throughout the school year, taking up much of the teachers’ time and energy – but I am sure you will all enjoy it

immensely. I have great pleasure in announcing that this year at Hogwarts, we will be hosting the Triwizard Tournament."

Fred and George loudly said together, "You're JOKING!"

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 23 – A Day of Firsts**

“I am not joking, Mr. Weasley” Dumbledore said, “though now that you mention it, I did hear an excellent one over the summer about a troll, a hag, and a leprechaun who all go into a bar...”

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat loudly.

“Er - but maybe this is not the time...no...” said Dumbledore, “where was I? Ah yes, the Triwizard Tournament...” He went on to explain what it was and how the death tolls caused it to be discontinued, but now the other schools had agreed to try again. Then he caused an uproar as he said, “...the Heads of the participating schools, along with the Ministry of Magic, have agreed to impose an age restriction on contenders this year. Only students who are of age – that is to say, seventeen years or older – will be allowed to put forward their names for consideration. This...”

Shouts of, “This is rubbish,” and many other similar sentiments could be heard for about a minute until something small flew into the Great Hall. It appeared to be a small, gray, feathery tennis ball. It flew straight toward Gryffindor table, toward where Harry was sitting with his friends, while everyone, even Dumbledore, watched with interest. As it flew closer, Harry could see that it was an owl, and it had a note tied to its leg.

It landed in front of Ginny Weasley, who hesitantly untied the note, saying, “I wonder who sent me this? It is a cute little owl though.” As soon as she removed the note, the bird hooted enthusiastically, and flew what appeared to be a victory lap around the table, causing several chuckles, while Ginny read her note. Her expression turned from confusion to happiness as she put the note in her pocket.

“Who was it from? What did it say?” asked the ever inquisitive Hermione.

“It’s from my parents,” said Ginny. “They decided that they’d get me my own owl as a reward for how good I did in classes last year. This is it. Mum said he looked so eager she couldn’t resist buying him.” She then stuck out her hand and the tiny owl landed on her. “Hello,

little owl. I'm you're new owner," she said as she stroked his feathers. "My name is Ginny. What should I call you?" she said as she looked into its eyes. "I know – Pigwidgeon! That's what your name is," she said, nodding her head at her owl.

"Pig-widgeon?" asked Harry, trying to stifle a laugh.

"Yes," said Ginny defiantly. "Pigwidgeon is a good name!"

"I agree," said Hermione, as Dumbledore finally continued with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Now that Miss Weasley has received her mail," causing her face to turn red as a few people, especially Slytherines, chuckled, "I believe it is time for bed. I know how important is for all of you to be well rested for tomorrow's lessons. Goodnight."

-

Harry then turned to Hermione and kissed her cheek, "I want to talk to Dumbledore. You can go to the common room."

"If it's all the same to you, love, I'm going with you. This is about Mrs. Figg, isn't it?"

Harry nodded his head as they both walked toward the staff table. "Mrs. Figg," Harry called out in the friendliest voice he could. "How are you?"

"Er, Harry, I, I'm fine," she said, "and before you ask, Professor Dumbledore had me move to Privit Drive when he left you with the Dursleys. I told him how they treated you, but he said leaving you there was for the best, and he forbade me from telling you about the magical world or your part in it. I'm sorry about how miserable you were when I babysat you, but I knew that if you'd enjoyed yourself, they wouldn't let you come back. I'm glad you finally got away from those horrible people, Harry. I hope we can be friends now."

"Sure, Professor. It's not your fault. By the way, this is my girlfriend, Hermione Granger."

"Hello dear," said Professor Figg, shaking Hermione's hand nervously.

"It's good to meet you, Professor," said Hermione amiably.

"If you'll excuse me, though, there's someone else I want to see."

With that, he strode over to Professor Dumbledore, who was attempting a hasty retreat. "Professor Dumbledore," said Harry in a friendly tone, "Could we speak with you in your office immediately?"

The aged man put his head down as he sighed, "Very well. I suppose we might as well get this over with. Come with me."

-

Within a few minutes, the three of them were in Dumbledore's office. Fawkes' perch was noticeably empty. Harry immediately began, "Why did you place Mrs. Figg to spy on me if you didn't care what she had to say?"

"I didn't disregard it, Harry; I just felt it was..."

"For the best," interrupted Hermione, surprising both the headmaster and Harry. "You say that a lot, as though you alone are the great and wise one who always knows what's for the best for everybody! You make wonderful people like Harry suffer their entire lives because of a decision you made! You hear reports of how the Dursleys treated Harry, but you know it's for the best because otherwise you're decision would be wrong, and that's impossible!" she said sarcastically.

Fortunately for Dumbledore, he was saved from further abuse by Fawkes flying in and singing the soothing song that phoenixes are known for. Fawkes landed on Harry's shoulder, and while Harry petted the phoenix, he said calmly, "Well, professor? What do you have to say for yourself?"

Dumbledore shut his eyes for a moment, and then answered. "I guess I have to say what I've been saying a lot this past year. I'm sorry Harry. That's all I can say. I can't take back actions or decisions from the past any more than you can."

“Fine,” said Harry, while the phoenix was still singing, “I guess you can’t change the past.”

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That night in Gryffindor tower, Hermione was sitting on a couch reading something from her laptop, while Harry was sitting next to her using his Game Boy, practicing Mario Kart, when Seamus Finnegan and Dean Thomas walked up to them.

Seamus said, “Hi guys. What are those?”

“I know what those are,” said Dean grinning, “but how are they working? I thought muggle electronic devices don’t work here.”

Harry paused his game, smiled ear to ear, and said, “Hermione and I found a way to make them work. We’ve each got a laptop with a magical battery that never runs out and a fast working connection to the Internet.”

“If I had my folks send my Game Boy here,” said Dean, “Can you make it work like yours?”

At that moment, the Weasley twins, who’d been listening in on the conversation, walked up. Fred put his hand on Dean’s shoulder and said, “Yes they can, my boy, but you’ll have to go through us. We’re business partners.”

George said, “How many Galleons is it worth to you?”

Dean looked from the twins to Harry, who nodded silently along with Hermione. Dean finally said, “Er, ten Galleons?”

“Thirty,” said Fred.

“That’s too much!” said Dean. “The most I’ll pay is fifteen.”

“Are you sure? The process gives you a magical battery that will never run out. We’ll even throw in making it impervious for free,” said George.

"That way when you drop it off the Astronomy tower while you're snogging," said Fred.

"Or you drop it in the lake," said George.

"It won't get damaged," said Fred.

Dean took a deep breath, "Ok, but it had better work like you said! I'll owl my folks tomorrow."

"Deal!" said George.

After Dean had walked off, Fred whispered, "I guess we now have a price for making a Game Boy work. Do you think it should be the same for everything?"

Hermione finally looked up from her laptop with a smile on her face. "For most things. Make it twenty-one Galleons for digital watches and thirty-nine Galleons for TVs, DVD Players, and computers. That's to get them power. For communication, it'll be nine Galleons for things like the Game Boys and TVs. Computers and cell phones will be eighteen Galleons. If you're not sure of something, ask me."

"I couldn't help but notice that every price you've named is easily divided by three," said Fred.

"I figured it would make easier math," said Hermione with a smirk, and then continued her studying. After virtually every muggle-raised Gryffindor had spoken to the twins about having something charmed for them (after Dean, Harry and Hermione simply referred people to their partners) while the other students simply watched with fascination the common room eventually cleared out. Harry and Hermione put their stuff away and started talking.

"Don't worry, Mine," said Harry in between kisses, "The muggle devices are new to people right now. There'll be a lot of people wanting them, and you'll make some money, but then the rush will be over."

She smiled, "I know Hero. Anyway, I don't think people will be directly bothering us about it anyway. I think now everybody in Gryffindor knows to talk to the twins."

"So what do you think, Mine? Should we bring our laptops to class tomorrow, or our books?"

"Well, er, I was thinking that tomorrow we should bring both, and just use the laptops. If one of the teachers has a problem with them, then we'll have the books with us," said Hermione.

"Well, I know that Moony and Padfoot won't have a problem, so we can leave those books in our dorms."

"Then it's settled?" asked Hermione. Harry nodded, and then she leaned her face to be about an inch from his and asked, "Whatever shall we do now?"

-

The next morning, Harry and Hermione woke up an hour before everyone else so they could exercise. Sirius was to meet them in his office and show them a place they could work out. They met him and said their, "Good morning's," sleepily. Sirius then told them to follow him.

After leading them to a certain seventh floor corridor, Sirius said, "You need to walk past this place three times thinking, 'I need a place to exercise,' over and over again. If you do it right, a door will appear and you'll find a perfect exercise room."

Harry and Hermione did as they were told, and to their astonishment, a door did appear. Hermione asked, "What is this place?" as she looked around at the exercise equipment.

"Dumbledore calls it, 'the room of requirement.' It will fulfill the requirements of everyone who uses it. When I told him about your training, he suggested using this room. Just don't abuse it and do something I wouldn't do with it."

Harry smirked. "And what exactly wouldn't you do with it?"

Sirius' ears turned slightly pink. He barked, "Just don't disobey school rules in here, ok," and walked off. "Enjoy your workout. Meet us back here after dinner." (The plan was to do the physical exercises in the morning before breakfast, and then to practice with Remus and Sirius after dinner.)

At breakfast, when they got their schedules, for the first time in his life Harry was glad to see they had Potions first period with the Slytherins. He glanced at Hermione to see that she was pleased as well. They had History of Magic with the Hufflepuffs as their second class of the day. A few minutes later, when the mail was coming, Hermione was surprised to receive a package from her parents carried by a Hogwarts owl. She opened up the attached note and read it out loud for Harry,

*"Dear Hermione,*

*We shipped this overnight to the Hogwarts mailing address, and hope you got it on your first day. It's a cell phone. We hope that you can charm them to work magically like you've been able to charm everything else, including Harry." Hermione blushed at this point, but continued. "If you can charm it to work, call us tonight. If not, send the phone back by owl.*

*Sincerely hoping we can hear your voice soon,*

*Love from*

*Mum & Dad*

*P.S. Tell Harry, Professor Black, and Professor Lupin we said hi!"*

"That's great!" said Harry. "I know you mentioned cell phones last night."

"Yes," said Hermione. "I researched how to charm them last night. I don't know why I didn't ask for one myself. I think that every muggle-raised student will end up getting one of these. They don't need to pay for minutes or anything. I've just got to charm them so they don't go off during lessons."

"I'd say it's better to just make sure the customers know to turn them off during lessons," said Harry.

"You should get one for yourself, Harry," she said enthusiastically.

"You're with me all the time, and the only other people with phones I might call are your folks, and I think you'd let me borrow your phone for that."

"If you say so, Harry," said Hermione, sounding a bit sad, "I just thought you'd want a way to keep track of me when we are separate, so that I could call you if I'm in some kind of trouble," she fake-sobbed, "But if I'm not that important to you..."

"Fine," said Harry, giving in. "Ask your parents to pick up a good phone for me, and make sure it's a flip-phone, so I don't end up accidentally calling people. I think I left them with enough money to take care of it." (Harry had left a thousand pounds with her parents in case he needed them to pick anything up for him while he was at school.)

All of the sudden, Hermione's countenance changed back to excited as she grabbed him for a quick kiss. "Now, let's see if I can get this phone ready before breakfast is over."

She did manage to finish breakfast, charm the cell phone, get her supplies, and make it to Potions class on time with Harry. There was a small amount of chatter going on until the side door opened and Sirius Black stepped into the room. Most of the students didn't know what to make of him yet, so they didn't want to get him upset. He was grinning ear to ear. He walked to the front of the classroom and said, "Hello class. As you all know, I'm Professor Sirius Black. As you also know, I was falsely accused of murders that Peter Pettigrew committed and spent some time in Azkaban, where I know some of your parents are right now." He shot a quick glance at Malfoy, whose smirk faded momentarily. "Now I understand that your previous professor favored his own house tremendously. I want you to know right from the start that I'm not going to show any favoritism in this class..."

“Except to Potter,” muttered Malfoy, apparently unaware of how good Sirius’ hearing was due to his animagus form.

“Mr. Malfoy,” said Sirius, “I have no intention of favoring Mr. Potter over anybody else, but I won’t be harassing him unfairly the way Snivelous Snape used to!” At this, all the Gryffindors, even Hermione, started laughing. “Excuse me, slip of the tongue. I meant to say Severus,” Black said, smirking so that the entire class knew he didn’t regret what he said. “Now, according to Professor Snape’s records, Mr. Malfoy here is tied with Miss Granger as the best potions student.” Malfoy smiled at the recognition. “For our first class, we’ll observe these two master potion brewers compete in mixing this potion individually.” Draco’s smile immediately disappeared. Sirius flicked his wand toward the blackboard, which showed the process for making a potion that Harry and Hermione had practiced together at his house. Judging by the look on Malfoy’s face, he hadn’t. “Well, both of you come up to the front of the class so we can watch.” Hermione happily took her supplies to a front desk while Malfoy, looking very nervous, did the same.

While those two were working, Hermione quite calmly and Malfoy quite panicky, Sirius began his lecture. “This will take them about an hour to brew. While they’re working, I’m going to teach you a little bit about this potion. As I understand it, putting the instructions on the board was Professor Snape’s idea of teaching. It’s not mine. I’m going to explain how and why different ingredients work together. Starting with the first ingredient of this potion...” Sirius lectured in a way that was easy to understand, and about a half hour later when he told them all to start working with a partner, even Neville wasn’t nervous about the potion. He was a bit nervous when he asked Ginny, who’d planned on partnering Hermione, to be his partner. She accepted and they began to work together. Harry got Dean to work with him for that class. When Hermione and Draco were finished, Sirius had the class pause for a few minutes (this particular potion could wait) while he inspected the pink substance in her cauldron. “This looks perfect, Miss Granger!” Sirius said. “Ten points to Gryffindor.” Now let’s inspect Mr. Malfoy’s. Based off of his Potions grade from last year, we should expect the same results. He held up a beaker of Malfoy’s blood red potion that appeared to have specks of dirt in it. “Not quite perfect, is it, Mr. Malfoy?”

The blonde boy looked ready to kill. “I guess not, the mudblood was distracting...”

“Fifty points from Slytherin for the use of that word, as well as five detentions with Mr. Filch!” interrupted Sirius, “and five points for trying to blame someone else for your own mistakes. If you were too busy looking at Miss Granger, that’s your own fault.” Draco’s face went white. “Your excuses aren’t going to work with me.” He then turned to the rest of the class. “As I’ve demonstrated with Mr. Malfoy, past grades don’t mean anything if you didn’t earn them. Everybody will have to earn their grade in this class, and yes Mr. Malfoy, that includes my godson Mr. Potter.” The class resumed mixing their potions, and many of the Gryffindors, including Harry, Dean, Neville, and Ginny, got Outstanding. Still more got Exceeds Expectations for their potions, while most of the Slytherin’s, including Draco, got an Acceptable, although Crabbe and Goyle, who’d foolishly partnered together when Draco was called up, got Troll as their grade when they turned in a green potion.

“Wow,” said Harry, grinning ear to ear, “That’s the first time I ever got an O in potions class!”

“You earned it!” said Hermione, giving him a quick kiss.

“I loved the way you humiliated Draco today! I never had any doubt in my mind that you would!”

She blushed, “That’s nice of you to say, but...”

“That’s not being nice, Mine. You are brilliant, in every sense of the word!”

“Thank you. Oh, there’s something I wanted to show you,” she said, dragging his arm and pulling him with her into a small door.

He looked around. “Well, you pulled me in this broom cupboard, what did you want to show me?”

“How much I love you,” she said, and then proceeded to snog him senseless until they heard a beep. They separated and Hermione

said, "That's my phone. I set the alarm so we wouldn't be late for class."

They then left the cupboard and noticed Ginny and Neville standing there grinning at them. "We saw you go in there, and wanted to make sure you made it to class. We were just about to get you when we heard beeping in there," said Ginny. She then added sarcastically, "Was that a smoke alarm?"

"Er," said Hermione, "It was a watch alarm to let us know it was time to stop." They then started walking toward their history class. "Thanks for waiting for us though," Hermione said, "We really do appreciate it, although it won't be necessary anymore."

"It's no problem," said Neville.

They then proceeded to the History of Magic class, where the young brunette teacher was sitting at the desk in navy blue robes. "Hello everyone," she said. "My name is Professor Brooks, and I've had the honor of finally replacing that deadbeat teacher." Everybody chuckled at that. "Now, here's my question for you. Has anybody here ever learned anything in this classroom? I'm not talking about reading the book while Professor Binns was boring everybody. I mean did he teach you anything? I'm not gonna make you answer that. As I understand it, the only thing he taught you was history from long ago, like goblin rebellions. Am I right?" The whole class nodded in agreement. "Has he ever taught you about recent history?" The whole class shook their head. "What is the single most important event to happen in the wizarding world in the past fifty years?" The whole class looked dumbfounded except for Hermione, who characteristically held up her hand. "Yes, Miss?"

"Granger, ma'am. Hermione Granger. The most important thing in recent history was the Vold-, er You-Know-Who war, which ended on Halloween thirteen years ago with the attack on the Potter family, which resulted in You-Know-Who's disappearance." Hermione gave a quick glance at her boyfriend, who nodded that he was ok.

"Correct, Miss Granger, and I think you should use the name Voldemort." Almost the whole class flinched. "There is absolutely nothing to fear from speaking the name that Tom Marvolo Riddle

fabricated for himself." Most of the class was astonished at this news (obviously not Harry, Ginny, or Hermione). "Oh yes, didn't you know? The man who calls himself Lord Voldemort was actually a student that came through here by the name of Tom Riddle. He was the son of a muggle man with the same name and a witch by the name of Merope Gaunt, who's father was named Marvolo. That family was the last of the Slytherins..." She then gave the most complete lecture on the origins of Voldemort that anybody had ever heard. She covered all the way until he graduated from Hogwarts, mentioning the orphanage, the chamber of secrets and the death of his father's family, and his extreme fear of dying, among other things. Hermione and Harry took out their laptops to take notes early in the lecture, and Professor Brooks said nothing about it.

"Wow!" exclaimed Harry, as he, Hermione, Neville, and Ginny were walking out of class. "That was the most interesting history class I've ever had – here or in the muggle world!"

"I never looked at it that way before," said Hermione. "Voldemort is a coward! He's as afraid of death as Ron is of spiders, and everything he's done, even his attempt to kill Harry, has had the ultimate purpose of letting him escape death."

"Tom would rather kill a baby than face his fear!" said Ginny, smirking (for the first time ever while discussing Riddle), "No wonder he wasn't a Gryffindor!"

## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 24 – Adjusting to School**

After a good laugh at Ginny's sentiment about Tom not being a Gryffindor, the four of them walked to the Great Hall for lunch, and decided to sit by Ron, who looked severely depressed.

"Hi Ron," said Ginny, trying not to sound too happy.

Ron looked up for a second and muttered, "I'm doomed."

"Your day couldn't have been that hard, Ron. After all, you have been to those classes before."

"What classes did you have?" asked Harry.

"My first period was Divination, and my second class was Potions."

Hermione said, "Who's teaching divination? Professor Dumbledore didn't announce a new teacher for that subject yesterday."

"That's because he just arrived," answered Ron. "His name is Professor Stewart. He got rid of the incense in that room. It's actually possible to stay conscious in there now. He's an ok bloke that doesn't act weird or anything. He says he doesn't have the gift of sight, but he has worked with genuine seers. He also said that if you don't have the gift, most methods used to attempt to cause a vision are futile. He also said that the gift would manifest itself without any help from a class, and that if anyone felt they had manifested the gift, he'd be happy to give them private lessons. He said we're going to be studying predictions that have been made that came true. He claims that the Ministry has a bunch of them somewhere at their headquarters, but no one but the people referred to in the prophecies can remove them. The ones we're going to study were made by some of the seers he knows. We're going to concentrate on interpreting prophecies. He claims that some people have heard a prophecy and then caused the event to happen by trying to stop it."

Harry and Hermione gave each other a significant look. "That sounds interesting," said Hermione.

“So,” said Harry, “How did you like Sirius’ class?”

“Well, it’s a lot better than Snape’s class, but it still seems confusing to me. I partnered up with this weird girl from Ravenclaw. She’s nice enough, though. She claims she knows you three. Her name is Luna Lovegood.”

“I’ve known her since my first year, and Harry and Hermione met her at the world cup. She’s a very nice girl, so I hope you don’t pick on her like the other kids.”

“Of course not,” said Ron. She’s my only friend in my year. I first tried to partner up with Colin Creevy, but he won’t speak to me for some reason.”

“He knows you’ve had fights with his hero,” said Ginny. “You know that he’s the biggest Harry Potter fan on the planet. He can’t seem to think about anything else. He even makes sure he sits at the same desk Harry uses. It’s pathetic!”

“Maybe I’m better off without him speaking to me,” said Ron.

Before they could reply, Dumbledore made an announcement. “I’d like to introduce you all to our new Divination teacher, who arrived this morning, Professor Stewart.” He then motioned toward a middle-aged black man as the students applauded.

Later that day, when Ginny, Harry and Hermione went to Arithmancy class, Professor Vector seemed very pleased to see them.

“Welcome to your first official arithmancy class, Mr. Potter, Miss Weasley,” she said. “If you put forth the same effort this year that you put into the summer, you’ll do splendidly.”

The trio sat close to each other, and Harry and Hermione took out their laptops to prepare for class.

Professor Vector looked at the strange devices and walked up to the couple. “Er, what are those?”

Harry answered first, "They're computers, Professor."

"They're muggle devices that store information. We've put the contents of all our textbooks in them," Hermione explained. "Look."

She turned her laptop to face the fascinated professor, who saw the contents of the textbook clearly shown on the screen. Hermione quickly showed her how to scroll down and mentioned some advantages.

"How did you get them to work here?" asked the professor.

"We charmed them so that they're powered by magic instead of electricity," answered Hermione. "Professor Black has one as well."

"I must have him show me his computer when I have more time," she said, and then began her class.

—

Their next class was Charms, and Professor Flitwick was completely fascinated with the computers as well. When it was time for them to practice their new charms, Harry was about to perform wandless nonverbal magic when Hermione grabbed his arm.

"Harry," she whispered, "Remember you have to use your wand and say the spell. We don't want anyone to know about our new abilities."

"Oh yeah, sorry," he said with a smile as he pulled his wand out of its holster. "It just seems so ridiculous to use it now."

"I know," said Hermione, but we've got to keep up appearances.

—

Later that night, after training with the older Marauders, while Hermione was talking to her parents on her new phone, the twins started handing Harry muggle devices to charm. Since Hermione was busy and most of them needed the simple battery charm, he decided to start on them, making sure to record them all on his computer (to make sure Hermione didn't kill him when she got off the phone. They

both agreed that they needed to keep their own records, just to make sure they weren't being cheated. It's not that they didn't trust the twins; they just felt it was good business.) He charmed about a dozen Game Boys, five cd players, and a small portable dvd player. He now had just one device left – a radio-controlled model helicopter that actually flew. It even had a type of clamp on the bottom that could grip or release small objects. Harry thought it would probably be used to transport dungbombs. He charmed the batteries, and then waited for Hermione to handle the remote control. He didn't have any idea how to make that work, and hoped she did.

While he was looking at it, and considering buying one for himself, Hermione came up to him. She smiled at her boyfriend. "Hi Hero, Mum and Dad said, 'hi,' and they'll be glad to pick you up a hot pink phone with red roses all over it."

"Very funny, Mine," said Harry.

"Where'd you get all this stuff?" she asked, indicating the pile of devices he'd charmed.

"Fred and George dropped them off for us to charm."

"Ok," she said, as she went to grab one of the Game Boys.

"I already charmed them," said Harry. "All but this helicopter. I don't have a clue how to get the remote to work."

"You shouldn't have done them all, Harry," Hermione protested. "I'm supposed to be the one earning the money."

Harry smiled at her. "I thought I'd do you a small favor. I hope that's alright."

She grinned back, "It is. Thanks. Let me take a look at the helicopter."

After reading out what frequency it transmitted at, she had no problem, so fifteen minutes later they were delivering the devices back to Fred and George.

Harry asked, "Who gave you the helicopter?"

“Actually,” said Fred.

“That one’s ours,” said George.

“To deliver dungbombs,” said Fred.

“To Filch’s office,” said George.

“Among other things,” they both said together.

“We’ll give you your money tomorrow,” said Fred.

“As soon as we get ours,” finished George.

-

The weeks passed quickly, and before they knew it, September was coming to a close. More and more students from all houses seemed to be acquiring Game Boys, cell phone, and many other muggle devices. It was fortunate for Harry and Hermione that charming most of them didn’t take much time. They were steadily keeping a few weeks ahead in their classwork while their earnings steadily grew. All of their professors approved of the laptops, so they were saved from having to carry their books around, which they found made it easier to fit inside broom closets. The Slytherins didn’t seem as bold as they used to once they learned that Sirius wouldn’t let them get away with everything. Their attitude seemed to have been properly adjusted. Some of the younger ones seemed to be getting along with kids from other houses. To Harry, it really seemed like the school had changed for the better, and he was proud to have been a part of it.

On a particular Saturday afternoon, Harry and Hermione were in the room of requirement practicing defensive spellwork with Sirius and Remus. The young couple now had perfected their wandless magic so much that they were fighting each other, while the professors were taking random shots at the both of them. The teens weren’t allowed to do anything but block or dodge the professors’ spells. Both teenagers found it difficult to concentrate on fighting the wandless opponent at the same time as the professors. These duels usually ended with one of them getting distracted and hit by a wandless spell.

This particular day, it was Harry who lost after an hour and a half – the longest duel they'd ever had. After Hermione helped him up, Sirius said, "You both did extremely well today, and I'd honestly be surprised if any Death Eaters could beat you with less than ten of them for each of you. While you're destroying the others wandlessly, one might get a shot at you."

Remus then said thoughtfully, "It might be a good idea to wear some kind of armor to protect you from something like that. I'll look into it."

"Anyway," said Sirius with a broad smile on his face, "I thought I'd tell you that the animagus potion is now ready!

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 25 – Animals

“Really!” said Harry, smiling.

“It’s ready?” asked Hermione happily.

“Yes,” said Sirius, smiling broadly. “I brought it with me knowing how eager you both are to be like me.” He then pointed at a table in the corner with two glasses on it. “I had it protected so that if a stray spell hit it, it wouldn’t get damaged.”

At that moment, two recliners appeared next to the small table. Remus said, “Once you drink it, you’ll pass out for a few minutes. I figured you’d rather be sitting in a recliner when that happens than standing up.”

“Good idea,” said Harry eagerly as he started walking toward the table, holding Hermione’s hand.

They grabbed their cups and sat in the chairs, reclining back. “Do you want to go first?” asked Harry.

“Let’s drink them together,” said Hermione.

Harry drank the vile potion as fast as he could, noting that he definitely needed to use mouthwash, brush his teeth, and then use mouthwash again once this was over. As he felt himself get light-headed, he glanced at Hermione, who was actually glancing back at him.

For a few moments, Harry found himself in complete darkness, which slowly faded away as though the sun were rising rapidly. He found himself standing on the sand in what appeared to be an endless desert. He looked ahead and saw a small puddle of water a few meters in front of him. It was the only thing he could see besides dry sand. He walked up to it and looked down. Instead of seeing his reflection, he saw a bird in mid-flight. It was a large bird with broad wings (about a 78-inch wingspan) and a broad tail. It had a short, hooked beak. Its plumage was mostly dark brown, and its eyes were green and appeared to have some sort of thin circles around them that looked very much like Harry’s glasses. He recognized the bird

from a muggle biology class as a golden eagle. He smiled to himself, thinking about the advantages of being able to fly. He was just wondering how soon he'd take his first flight when everything started getting dark again.

He opened his eyes and saw he was back on the recliner with two marauders standing over him. He could see them looking at him expectantly. He smiled broadly and said, "I'm, I'm a golden eagle."

"I always knew you were a bird-brain," teased Sirius.

"I'll bet the ability to fly without a broom will come in handy!" said Lupin, smiling broadly.

At that moment they heard Hermione's voice call out, "I'm sure it will!" They all turned toward her and looked expectantly. She smiled and said, "I'm an eagle owl."

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After the young couple had rested a few minutes and been instructed not to attempt a transformation for twenty-four hours, they left and took a short walk around the school. "I'm glad you're over your fear of heights, Mine," said Harry. "It would be funny to see an owl walking on the ground afraid to flap her wings."

She soft-punched him in the shoulder and said, "That's not funny, Hero!"

"Yes it is," said Harry, earning another not-so-soft punch. "Ow. That hurt."

"Good," said Hermione. "The hero got beat up by his girlfriend."

Harry suddenly got a wicked grin on his face. "I'd say that qualifies as a fight," he said slyly. "Which means that it's time to..."

"...make up!" said Hermione eagerly, as she grabbed his hand and pulled him toward a broom closet.

-

Later that day, they found themselves sitting in the library reading books on types of protective clothing. They'd brought their laptops in case they found anything important. Harry was bored. He'd much rather revisit the broom closet. "Mine," he said sweetly, "Remus said he'd look into types of armor. We really don't have to..."

"I want to, Hero. We may find something he didn't think of." She flipped through her book for a few minutes and then smiled. She put something in that page and then flipped to another section. She whispered, "Perfect!"

Harry looked at her and asked, "What's perfect?"

"I've come up with a solution that I doubt Professor Lupin thinks is possible. This book says that dragon-hide is one of the most magically reflective substances in the world, and is therefore worn by many people such as aurors wishing to protect themselves."

"I'm sure Lupin would have found that out if he doesn't already know it."

"The next line says that the only thing that can protect even better is basilisk-hide, but that it is extremely rare."

Harry looked interested. "I guess it is. But if you're thinking of the one in the chamber, I'm sure it's rotted away by now."

"No it hasn't," Hermione said proudly. "I looked it up. It said that although its insides decay normally, the skin of a basilisk won't even start to rot for at least ten years. It also said that only extremely powerful spells, as well as powerfully enchanted swords and knives can penetrate its skin. It can even block one avada kadavra every twenty-four hours! Once the skin is properly made into armor, it never rots. This book contains a spell to cast on a dead basilisk to take exactly the right amount of skin and create a complete set to cover an entire body. This includes boots, socks, pants, long sleeve shirt with a hood, and gloves. It says that a full grown basilisk can be used to make suits for up to four full grown people!"

“Wow!” said Harry. “That’s great! Hold on. What about when we grow? I need new robes every year. I’ll end up with great armor that I can’t fit into.”

“The book also says that it can be recycled with a spell, so every year or so we could increase the size. Don’t worry! It’s perfect.”

Harry grinned at her. She was so smart. “All right. What do you say we visit the chamber tomorrow?”

“Visit the chamber?” came a female voice from behind them. They turned to see a nervous-looking redhead girl behind them. “You mean the Chamber of Secrets?”

“Er,” said Harry, showing his remarkable mastery of the English language. He tried to think up a lie, but knew it was useless. He glanced at Hermione, who nodded at him. “Yes, Ginny,” he whispered, “We’re going down there to get the basilisk skin to make armor out of it.”

“You are,” Ginny said, obviously having a hard time with this topic. “Why?”

“Basilisk-hide is the most magically reflective substance that occurs naturally. It’s even more powerful than dragon-hide,” said Hermione.

“And we figured that since it’s there, and I seem to always end up in danger, we might as well get it. Hermione found a spell to make the armor, so we don’t have to cut up the snake ourselves.”

Ginny looked down at the floor for a few seconds, and then surprised them both by saying, “Can I come too?”

“Er, um, well,” said Harry. “Why would you want to come?”

Ginny looked down again. “Er, I, I still sometimes have nightmares about that place. I think it might help if I, y’know face my fear. I’ve thought about asking Harry to take me down there before, but, well, I didn’t know how he’d react.”

After getting a nod from Harry, Hermione took the other girl's hand and squeezed it saying, "Of course you can come along."

"Thanks guys," she said, "I also think I deserve one of those outfits."

"No problem," said Harry, "According to the book, we can make four, and we can adjust them for when we grow so that it always fits."

"So when are we going?" asked Ginny.

"Going where," said the voice of Neville, who had just arrived at the library.

After they quietly explained it to Neville, who also wanted to go with and get his own armor, Hermione copied that book into her computer so that it was ready for them to bring down to the chamber.

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The next morning after practice, which Harry now won when Hermione was stunned by Lupin an hour and forty minutes into the match, they started talking.

Hermione said eagerly, "Professor Lupin, you don't have to worry about getting us armor now, we've come up with a solution – Basilisk-hide!"

Remus and Sirius both looked stunned. Remus spoke, "Basilisk? Where would you find...even if you could, how much money?"

"It won't cost anything," said Harry, "and it's underneath this very school."

"You mean in the Chamber of Secrets," said Sirius. "I remember you guys telling me about it. Actually as I recall, Hermione was talking while you were hiding your head."

"The Chamber of Secrets exists?" said Lupin. "I heard rumors, but I thought...Harry, you really slew a basilisk?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I got lucky. The point is that its skin protects even better than dragon skin, and it's down there for the taking."

Hermione nodded, "We're going to get it later today with Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom. We even found a spell that will do all the work for us, making each of us an outfit."

"They overheard us. Ginny wanted to go with, and we felt she's entitled to an outfit, and Neville wanted one too. I'm afraid we won't have enough left for the two of you," said Harry.

Sirius and Lupin gave each other a quick glance.

"I do suggest that you get yourselves a dragon-hide outfit," added Hermione.

"Alright," said Sirius, "let's get started on animagus practice before we stay here all day. You've obviously got plans for later. By the way, Tonks is going to come to Hogwarts next weekend."

Both teenagers' faces brightened at the news, "Really?" they both said together.

After about an hour, each of them had managed a beak, while Harry also grew a few feathers on his arms. They were only able to hold these forms for a few minutes. Remus and Lupin complimented them on a good first attempt before they left for the common room to meet up with Ginny and Neville.

They found the two of them having an obviously pleasant conversation, sitting closely together on a sofa. "Hi guys," said Harry, startling them from behind, "Are you ready to go?"

"Oh, er, yeah," said Ginny nervously.

"I'll go get my firebolt so that we can get out of there," said Harry. "Who has a broom? It's a long walk through there, and it would be easier and faster to fly."

“Harry,” said Hermione, “You know I got myself a Cleansweep before school started, and we’ve practiced flying a few times since we got here.”

“I know that. I meant the others. Ginny, Neville, do you have one?”

Neville spoke first, “You saw what happened the first time I tried to fly. I’ve never gotten on a broom since.”

Ginny looked down, “Er, no. I asked my parents for one, but...”

“That’s all right, Ginny. You can ride behind Hermione, and Neville can ride behind me.”

They got their brooms and Hermione’s laptop in a carrying case strapped across her shoulders, and made their way to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. When they entered, Myrtle said, “Hello Harry, why haven’t you visited in so lon...who’s that other boy? He’s kind of cute.”

Neville blushed slightly to everyone else’s amusement. “Er, my name is Neville.”

While Neville reluctantly chatted with Moaning Myrtle, Harry hissed at the appropriate sink and revealed the entrance to the chamber. “Ok,” Harry said, “I’ll jump down first. Then Neville, Ginny, and Hermione.”

“What do you mean, ‘jump?’” asked Ginny. “You’re supposed to say, ‘stairs’ in parseltongue to make a staircase appear. Didn’t you know that?” Harry shook his head, dumbfounded. “Well, I’d wondered why they weren’t there when we left. I was too distraught to think about it at the time, and didn’t want to bring up the subject later. Did you really think that Salazar Slytherin or Tom Riddle would jump down a hole when they couldn’t see the bottom?”

“Er, I guess not,” said Harry, now looking at the carving of a snake on the faucet. He hissed, “Stairs,” in snake language, and a circular stone staircase appeared. They then walked down the staircase. Once they were downstairs, Harry could see Ginny start to tremble

before Neville put his arm around her. Harry said, “I think we should mount our brooms now,” so they got on the brooms the way they’d agreed. Harry and Hermione, who were at the front, held one hand on the broomstick with one hand pointing a lit wand forward like headlights. They quickly flew past the layers of rat skeletons that littered the floor, and in no time, they came across the remains of the snakeskin and the cave in Professor Lockhart had caused. There was just enough room for them to fly past the rocks on the ground that Ron had cleared out a year earlier. Neville said, “What caused the cave-in.” After Harry explained what Lockhart had done, he said, “That fraud! That bloody coward! That evil git! I hope he never gets out of St. Mungo’s!”

“St. Mungo’s?” asked Harry, Hermione, and Ginny at the same time.

Neville looked nervous, “Er, yeah, that’s where they sent him. I, er, was at the hospital visiting, er, someone and ran into him.”

They soon reached the solid wall on which two entwined serpents were carved. Harry hissed, “Open,” in the language only he and Voldemort could speak. The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight, and the quartet, still on broomsticks, flew inside.

The first thing they noticed was the stench. Instinctively, Harry wandlessly cleared the air. Fortunately, neither Neville nor Ginny noticed. They were too occupied with the horrid smell, and then too relieved by its departure to care how it went away.

They quickly flew past the pillars and came to the spot where Harry had found Ginny a year ago. They dismounted the brooms, and Ginny knelt on the floor, putting her hands where she had awoken the year before, and started trembling slightly. “This, this is the spot where Harry found me.” Tears were now starting to fall from her eyes as Neville gently put his hands on her shoulders. “There’re the remains of the basilisk,” she said pointing at a smelly, decomposing snake.”

Harry and Hermione walked toward the snake. When they were close enough, Hermione took out her laptop and turned it on. Once she had the spell on the screen, she pointed her wand at Harry (they didn’t

want to let the others know about their wandless abilities, plus they weren't sure whether they could do this exact spell), and uttered a long Latin incantation. Harry's body glowed green for about five seconds, and then Hermione pointed her wand at the basilisk and uttered more Latin, until the basilisk glowed green. Suddenly there was an incredibly bright flash of green coming from both the basilisk and Harry. When the flash was over, the basilisk was missing some skin, Harry was wearing his new outfit, and the clothes he had been wearing were folded neatly in a pile on the floor in front of him. His trainers were in front of the clothes. He looked at his form-fitting green basilisk outfit and said, "Not bad! It's actually pretty comfortable, too."

Ginny and Hermione both whistled at him (the flash had gotten Ginny and Neville's attention) while Neville nodded appreciatively. Hermione then performed the spell on Ginny, who received whistles from both Neville and Harry. Neville was next (He was glad he'd dieted that summer when he got whistles from the girls), and then Harry performed the spell on Hermione. Harry was so overwhelmed by her appearance that he couldn't even whistle, but Neville did. Harry said, "You look incredible!" when he was finally able to speak, causing Hermione to blush.

To change the subject, Hermione said, "Now we should put our old clothes on over this."

After a few minutes, they were redressed. They decided to keep wearing the boots, vowing to claim it was dragon hide if anybody asked. Hermione put her laptop back in its case, magically had the four sets of trainers follow them, and they all headed out of the chamber.

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 26 – The Dark Lord Will Have Your Blood**

Later that night, Harry and Hermione were sitting together in the common room after charming a bunch of muggle devices when Harry said, “Mine,”

Hermione smiled and said, “Yes, Hero?”

“There’s something that’s been bugging me a bit since we left the chamber.”

She turned her head toward Harry and said, “What’s that, Love?”

“That book said that we could only make four outfits, but it looked like over half of the basilisk’s skin was still there after we were done. I know we’re not fully grown yet, but honestly, I think more could be made. Do you think the book could be wrong about that?”

“Hm,” said Hermione, “Maybe that Basilisk is bigger than most. I’ll check that out.” Almost instantaneously her laptop came floating down to them from her dorm. After she caught it, she turned it on and it loaded up, she looked up the book that contained the spell and decided to read the book’s description of a basilisk. “Oh my. I really should have read this before we went down there. It says that the only basilisk known to exist during the lifetime of the author was only thirty feet long, so it called that the average size. The one inside the chamber is at least sixty feet. If you average it out to four outfits for every thirty feet, it comes to each outfit taking seven and a half feet of skin. At that rate, the one in the chamber could handle eight outfits!”

“We should tell Lupin and Sirius tomorrow morning and get down there as soon as we can to make them outfits. By the way, is there any spell to just remove the skin so we don’t have to keep going back down there again and again?”

“I’ll find out.” After a few minutes of scrolling down, Hermione said, “I was too excited about finding the spell yesterday. I should have read the whole book. There is a spell that takes all the skin off the creature and folds it up neatly so it can be taken away. The same spell I used earlier can be used on that. I’m sorry I didn’t read this before.”

“Don’t worry about it, Mine. There’s no harm done. Besides, if it weren’t for you, we wouldn’t even know about the armor.” He then kissed her deeply.

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The next day after training, which was after dinner since it was a Monday, Harry explained that there was in fact enough skin to make outfits for the two of them, along with two more outfits as well. They knew Harry would have to go down there with them because he’s the only one who could speak snake-language (unless they found Voldemort and got him to help) and Hermione insisted that she join them too. They decided to go down to the chamber immediately after dinner the next day. When they got back, they’d see how much time they had left to train. And so it wasn’t long until they found themselves back inside the Chamber of Secrets. The Marauders had their own brooms (Sirius’ firebolt and one of the cleansweeps Sirius had bought) and they were looking over the chamber very enthusiastically. It was difficult to get them to stay still long enough to have the spell performed on them.

When Hermione complained, Sirius said, “But this is a legendary place! I know you two have been here before, but we haven’t! This may very well be the only thing that’s not in the Marauder’s Map. We’ll have to change that! This would make a great secret base! Only Voldemort himself could penetrate it! The fact that only Harry can open it would be an inconvenience, but I think we could live with it.”

“Actually,” said Hermione thoughtfully, “We could try recording Harry when he opens the door. Maybe playing it back would work.”

Harry smiled, “That’s a great idea! I’ll call your parents tonight and have them pick up something for that.”

“We’ll have to be careful about making sure no one knows about the recording,” said Lupin.

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” said Hermione. “If anyone sees us with them, they’ll just assume it’s music.”

"You know what!" Harry said, "My cell phone, and I'll bet Hermione's too, can record sound as a memo. We'll try using that! If that will work, then it'll be perfect! We'll just get you each a phone."

"Sounds great," said Sirius. Hermione started performing another spell on the snake, while Sirius was looking closely at the open mouth of Slytherin's statue. "What's this hole for?" he asked.

"That's where the basilisk came from," answered Harry. "Why?"

"I was wondering where the passage leads to," said Sirius.

"I don't know," said Harry shrugging. "I've never followed it."

"It might be a good idea to find out," said Lupin, who had just finished putting his robes over his armor. "You never know what secrets were kept in the Chamber of Secrets by Slytherin and Voldemort."

"All right," said Hermione, who had finished the spell that took all the skin off of the dead basilisk. "Let's go."

There was enough room so that they could all fit flying single file with Sirius in the lead with his wand lit, followed by Harry, Hermione, and Lupin. After about ten minutes, they came across an open doorway on the left. Sirius turned into it, followed by the others. They found it was a small room full of dust with a bookshelf full of books, a file cabinet, a desk, and a chair at the desk. On the desk were an old muggle spiral notebook and a cup full of muggle pens and pencils. Harry picked up the notebook and dusted it off. He opened it and read the first line written inside. It said, 'Tom Marvolo Riddle: I AM LORD VOLDEMORT!' At that moment, Harry's scar started hurting worse than it ever had before. He covered it with his hand and collapsed onto the floor.

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He opened his eyes to find himself lying on a dusty concrete floor facing Sirius, Remus, and of course, Hermione. He looked around to see where he was. He recognized the room he'd collapsed in almost immediately. "How long was I out?" he asked.

“About a minute,” said Hermione. “Sirius revived you after you collapsed. You were holding onto your scar. Did it hurt when you read that notebook?”

“Yes! Voldemort wrote it. I think someone should read it, but it obviously can’t be me.”

“Lupin is checking it for curses. So far he’s removed four,” said Sirius.

“Make that five,” said Lupin, who was sitting at the desk with his wand pointed at the offending notebook.

“I think this room contains a lot of useful information,” said Sirius, “but I think it’s guarded by some serious curses. I don’t want you two coming back here snooping around.”

Harry smiled as his godfather helped him up, “I’m hardly in a position to disagree. But I’ll bet Hermione will be hounding Lupin until she finds out how he’s detecting those curses.”

Hermione blushed. “Anyway,” said Sirius. “I think it’s late enough. Moony, do you think you can safely levitate that book to your office?”

“Yes. I’ll float it ahead of us so it doesn’t touch anyone.”

They left that room with the book. When they reached the main chamber, they didn’t even stop as Hermione wandlessly floated the basilisk skin, along with her computer, behind them. The young couple went straight to Gryffindor Tower, forgoing their duel since Harry was still feeling a bit weak.

The next morning, Harry was fine and went through training normally. The rest of the week went by very quickly as they kept up with all their combat training, snogging, animagus training, snogging, muggle object charming, snogging, studying, and of course snogging. On Saturday morning, they were happy to see Tonks when they showed up for their training.

“Wotcher, Harry and Hermione! Have you spent more time training or inspecting broom closets since school started?”

They both blushed, but Hermione said, "Training."

Harry added, "I only wish we could spend that much time..."

"Harry James Potter!" said Hermione.

"Er, sorry," said Harry.

"Anyway," said Tonks, "Let's start exercising."

She worked them tirelessly for an hour, and then switched to dueling. She decided to have two separate duels. One would be Harry against Hermione, Tonks, Sirius, and Lupin. The other would be Hermione against Harry, Tonks, Sirius, and Lupin. The first duel ended after an hour when Tonks stunned Harry (they took off their armor for practice) while he was blocking a hex sent by Hermione. The second duel ended after fifty minutes, when Harry petrified Hermione while she was blocking a curse sent by

Tonks. After they were finished, Hermione made a basilisk armor suit for Tonks while the others put theirs back on. While Sirius and Harry were whistling at Tonks, Remus was stuttering and blushing. Harry left before the rest of them because he had to use the loo.

When he stepped out of the loo, he heard a vaguely familiar voice say something like, "Sectumsempra," and felt a hex hit his side, putting a hole in his clothes and stopping at his armor. He looked and for a second saw his former potions master with a shocked expression on his face holding an empty jar. He immediately turned around and started running, only to be wandlessly summoned back by Harry. Snape turned and fired another hex which Harry easily dodged, making his way toward the greasy git. Snape pointed his wand at Harry again, only to find it fall out of his hand and roll across the floor. While he was watching that, he didn't notice Harry had gotten close enough to punch him square in the nose, breaking it. Snape, who had never been in a muggle fight, didn't know what to do as Harry punched each of his eyes in turn, making sure to leave a 'signature.' Harry then kicked Snape in the crotch, causing the partially blinded and dazed potions master to collapse to the floor in agony.

At that moment, just when Harry was gonna kick Snape in the face, Tonks called out, "That's enough, Harry!"

Harry slowly backed away, finally pulling out his wand for show and pointing it at Snape. "Look what you did!" he called out at Snape, "You got blood all over my robes!"

At that moment, Snape reached into his pocket, smirked, and said, "This isn't over, Potter! The Dark Lord will have your blood!" and disappeared as he apparently used a portkey.

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 27 – Missions

The pathetic, hideous, tiny form that was Tom Marvolo Riddle was sitting in a chair in his room at Riddle Manor. His faithful servant had just finished milking Nagini and feeding his master. This servant was now asleep. Voldemort heard the stairs of the manor creaking, indicating someone was approaching. He hoped that it was his other servant, the one that he didn't trust as much as the other. If he was back from his mission, then Voldemort would finally have a healthy body that doesn't need to be nursed. Whoever was on the other side of the door knocked. "Who dares disturb Lord Voldemort?"

"It is your servant, Severus Snape, master," came the voice from the other side of the door.

"Enter."

The door opened and Voldemort saw a man with two black eyes and a hastily-set nose. He bowed before Voldemort, not saying anything.

"Did you retrieve the boy's blood?" he asked coldly.

"No, my master, I..."

"Crucio," said Voldemort, pointing his wand at the writhing figure in front of him. After about a minute, the Dark Lord released the spell. "Why?"

"I used Sectumsempra on him, but it didn't hurt him. Then I dropped my wand and he..."

"Crucio." While Snape was still writhing in agony, Voldemort yelled, "You clumsily dropped your wand, and then the boy beat you up like a common muggle! You, who call yourself the 'Half-Blood Prince?'"

"Y-Y-Yes M-M-My L-L-L-Lord," said Snape, still under the curse.

He released Snape, who lay panting on the floor. "The boy has no talent, you said. It will be easy, you bragged. Obviously you overestimated your pathetic abilities! You will try again, with a better plan, and will find allies to join you!"

"Yes my lord," said Snape, as he got up off the floor and turned to leave.

"By the way Snape," said Voldemort, causing Snape to turn, "CRUCIO!"

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Harry woke up, clutching his slightly irritated scar. This was the first Voldemort dream that Harry almost enjoyed. He knew he should have strengthened his occlumency shields before bed, but he didn't. Part of him was actually hoping to see Voldemort's punishment of Snape for failing in his mission. He was as mad at Snape as Voldemort was, albeit for different reasons. At least Dumbledore finally admitted that he had been wrong about Snape rejecting Voldemort. He remembered the conversation they'd had about ten minutes after Snape had escaped.

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"I'm sure that Severus was simply trying to give us a message about Voldemort."

"He snuck up and sent a spell that sounded like 'secumsepra' at me that cut through my robes. He was shocked when it didn't cut me!" shouted Harry. He, Dumbledore, Sirius, Remus, Tonks, and Hermione were in Dumbledore's office.

Dumbledore's expression turned grave. "Do you mean sectumsempra?"

"Yeah, that's it!" said Harry. "I'll bet it would've killed me if I weren't wearing my armor."

"Yes Harry," said Dumbledore, "If it's not properly treated within a minute, the victim bleeds to death. There are very few people who know how to heal someone who's been attacked with that curse. You see, Severus Snape invented it. What exactly did he say when he was leaving?"

"The Dark Lord will have your blood," said Tonks.

Dumbledore's eyes widened. "Your blood? He must know that your protection is in your blood! Probably because of your encounter with Professor Quirrel. There are many dark spells that require blood, and I'll bet that there is a spell for rejuvenating a body that involves blood, although I haven't studied many of those. I'll have to research that."

"Could I help you with your research?" asked Hermione.

"Certainly Miss Granger, though I doubt that we'll be able to find a book at Hogwarts that contains the spell we are looking for."

"I wonder if one of Riddle's old books contains it," said Lupin. "I'll make studying them a top priority."

"I say that killing Snivelus should be our top priority!" barked Sirius.

"I am afraid that Severus Snape is indeed helping Voldemort," said Dumbledore, "and must be stopped before he succeeds in acquiring Harry's blood. And now onto other matters. Harry, you mentioned that you are wearing some type of armor that blocked sectumsempra."

"That's right, Professor," said Harry proudly, "Basilisk hide."

Dumbledore looked astonished. "Basilisk? You went back down to the chamber. Remus, is that where you found those books of Riddle's that you mentioned?"

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore."

"Auror Tonks, I understand that you have been helping to train Harry and Hermione in combat. How are they performing?"

"Well," said Tonks, "There's not much more that I can teach them. I just try my best to keep them on their toes. They are performing better than most seasoned aurors. Of course their wandless magic makes it hard to fight them. I can't tell when or what they're doing."

"Wandless magic?" said Dumbledore.

“Yes,” said Harry while causing Dumbledore’s half-moon glasses to rise off of his nose and stay in the air until Dumbledore grabbed them, smiling broadly.

“It is indeed a coincidence that Mr. Malfoy would become so clumsy as to trip or drop his books almost every time he is near one of you two,” he said with a twinkle in his eye to Harry and Hermione, whose ears turned pink. “It may be better to go easy on him. After all with his father in prison...”

“Lucius attacked Hermione!” shouted Harry, interrupting Dumbledore, “What should I have done?”

“What should YOU have done?” asked Dumbledore, “but according to the Daily Prophet, it was Auror Tonks who...I see. Wandless magic?”

“Yes,” said Hermione. “Although Malfoy’s attack didn’t get me, Harry petrified him on the spot. Tonks was nearby and took the credit to cover for us. Malfoy doesn’t even know Harry did it.”

“Very well. Now, if the rest of you excuse me, I’d like to bid you a good evening and speak privately with Mr. Potter and Miss Granger.” Everyone else left, although Sirius waited for Harry to nod at him.

“Your training is proceeding far faster than I could’ve imagined. I believe you are both ready for my personal training. Unfortunately, with the Tri-Wizard Tournament, I will not have the time to train you until the summer. Normally, the training I have in mind will take at least a year, but I suspect it will take much less time, especially if I let you read certain books over the course of this year. I believe that I can train you both by the end of the summer.”

“Would we have to spend the summer in the castle?” asked Harry. “I’d really miss Potter Manor.”

“Well, what I have to teach you must be taught where it cannot be detected. Hogwarts is one such place. I also believe that Potter Manor is another such place. Am I correct?”

“Yes sir,” said Harry.

“Then if I may visit there daily during the summer, then I could conduct the training at Potter Manor.”

“I suppose I could give you floo access this summer,” said Harry.

“Then it’s settled,” said Dumbledore. “I shall speak with you before the school year is out to arrange exact times. In the mean time, I’ll loan you a few books.” He took two old thick dusty tomes off of his shelf. “Be very careful with them. They are ancient, and have been magically protected with a spell that protects the books from certain curses, also protects them from being magically repaired.”

“Does that spell stop the text from being magically scanned?” asked Hermione.

“I’m not certain, Miss Granger. I’ve only attempted to copy the book as a whole, but it wouldn’t work. Why?”

At that moment, Hermione’s laptop flew into the room from the window, straight into Hermione’s hands. “If I can scan the text, I can put the books on our computers, so we won’t need to take those books out of your office. Let’s see.” She opened up the computer and turned it on. When it was loaded up, she started wandlessly scanning the text into the computer and onto the network. She smiled. “It worked. Where are the rest of the books you want us to read?”

“Ingenious! All of the books on this shelf.” He indicated the shelf he’d pulled the others off of, twenty in total. “You wandlessly summoned your computer from Gryffindor Tower while talking to me?”

“Yes sir,” she said, “and so can Harry.” Then she turned to her boyfriend. “Harry,” said Hermione, “I think you can go now. This will take a few minutes. You should have Madam Pomfrey take a look at you.”

“Yes,” said Harry sarcastically, “Snape’s assault on my hands was merciless. The way he slammed into my right hand with his nose, and then his eyes. And then he attacked my foot with his crotch.” He chuckled. “I know neither of you will approve, but it was fun beating that greasy git Death Eater up after I wandlessly made him drop his wand.”

After he'd left, he started reading the first book off Potter network through his laptop. It was about medical curses. It was a way to affect the health of your opponent. Give them a sudden allergy attack or a bad case of the flu in the middle of a duel. The book had spells to do something as simple as making someone loose control of their bladder, to things far more serious, like causing a heart attack or stroke. He'd never thought about that before. Although his wandless magic didn't work the same as his wand magic in that it didn't need magic words, he decided to memorize them in case he wanted to let someone know he'd been the one to perform the spell (take credit for the bad case of diarrhea that Malfoy was about to suffer the next time he called Hermione a mudblood). Harry decided that he'd first have to practice with Crabbe and Goyle first, to make sure he got it right.

He now lay in bed, knowing Snape had been properly punished, and looking forward to punishing Draco for everything he's done. He smiled to himself, reinforced his occlumency shields, and went back to sleep. He was going to have fun in the morning.

The next day Harry and Hermione walked hand in hand into the Great Hall for breakfast. They sat down in their usual seats and began to eat. It wasn't long before Malfoy came strutting up toward their table (Crabbe and Goyle at his two sides) sneering. "I heard that you were attacked yesterday, Scar-Head, and that a female auror had to protect you! You're so...WHAT!" At that moment, a yellowish liquid flowed out from the left leg of his pants, over his shoes, and down on the floor, leaving a puddle that everyone in the Great Hall could see. He turned bright red and ran out of there toward the Slytherin common room, presumably to change his pants. In the mean time a terrible stench was coming from the direction of Crabbe and Goyle. They both clenched their backsides and ran out after Malfoy.

A moment later, Fred and George walked up on either side of the couple. "We couldn't help but notice," said Fred.

"That Malfoy and his stooges suffered their little problems," said George.

"While they were insulting you," said Fred.

"Ok guys," said Harry, "It'll cost you ten Galleons." They each gave him five. "Here are the spells." He then wrote out the Latin words on a piece of parchment. "Just remember that I know a lot worse spells than them."

"Thanks Harry," said Fred, "You should be the school champion."

"Too bad you're too young," said George.

"Now we'd like to speak to our brother Ron," said Fred.

Harry chuckled at he imagined what they were gonna do to Ron. Although he'd warned the twins not to use those spells on him, he was glad he was wearing that armor, just in case they did it anyway. Once the laughter over Malfoy and company had died down, Harry noticed that the conversations around him had gone to the approaching tournament, but he realized that he didn't really have any interest in it. According to Tonks, both he and Hermione could take out any student in the castle, and many aurors at the ministry. Because of their training, both he and Hermione were probably much more qualified to enter than any seventh year. But the fact was that he didn't have the time to train for a tournament, and it would be stupid to risk his life for a trophy and money he didn't need. He had much more important things to do with his life. When Snape returned, it would be with more people and better planning. He had to be ready for them, not in the hospital wing because of some stupid competition. He had a mission.

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 28 – Confidants and Champions**

Later that night, Ron had a very embarrassing experience in the Gryffindor Common Room that was very similar to Malfoy's experience in the Great Hall. Unfortunately, Harry and Hermione were not there to witness the event. They were training in the Room of Requirement with Sirius and Remus.

When the duel of the night ended, Lupin said, "I'd like to talk to you for a minute about that notebook of Voldemort's. I have an idea of why your scar hurt from it."

"I've been wondering about that myself," said Harry. "Even Riddle's diary didn't affect my scar. Why would his notebook?"

"That's a good question," said Hermione.

"I got a sample of the ink that he wrote his name with and gave it to our Potions Master," he gestured at Sirius, who bowed politely, "and he tested it. He found out that the ink used contained blood."

"Blood," asked Hermione, "Whose blood? Why?"

"As for who's blood, I should think you of all people would be able to figure that out," said Lupin, smirking.

"It has to be V-Voldemort's blood to affect Harry's scar. But why?"

Lupin answered, "Let's just say that there are certain special curses that can be put on a book if you title it using ink that contains your own blood. Now that I know what I'm dealing with, I can counteract the curse. Unfortunately, it will still take about a week before we can read it."

"I hope whatever he wrote in there is worth the wait," said Harry.

"Considering how much trouble he put into protecting it," said Sirius, "I doubt it's a recipe for pumpkin juice."

"I guess not," said Harry.

“Oh,” said Sirius, “There was something else I wanted to talk to you about. Tonks thinks you should bring a few other students into our duels. She thinks they’re getting too easy for you.”

Hermione looked shocked. “But, if we do that, we’ll have to tell them about our wandless magic.”

“True,” said Lupin, “Do you think you can trust anyone that much?”

“Well,” said Harry, “Even if we did trust someone enough, they need to learn occlumency so that no one will be able to extract the information from them.”

“What about the two that you took into the chamber with you?” asked Sirius, “Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom. They already know some of your secrets. Do you think you can trust them?”

“I trust them as much if not more than any other students,” said Harry. “I know Neville is loyal, and I can’t imagine Ginny betraying me.”

“She owes you a life debt,” said Lupin. “It might be a good idea to remind her of that while you’re talking to her.”

“All right,” said Harry, looking at Hermione, who nodded, “We’ll talk to them.”

“We should probably bring them here to talk so we have privacy to demonstrate our skills,” said Hermione. “It would be easier if one of you teachers would escort us. It is getting late, but I think we should talk to them tonight.”

“All right,” said Lupin, “I’ll go with you to Gryffindor tower. I doubt the head of Slytherin house is welcome there.”

Harry chuckled, “You know Sirius, I’ve never asked you how that’s been going. Do you think you’ve been reaching any of the Slytherins?”

“Actually,” said Sirius with a smile, “It actually seems like most of them, with the exception of Malfoy and a handful of others, aren’t really evil. They actually acted like that because Snape and Malfoy

would pressure them into it. With Snape gone and Draco being humiliated all the time..."

"...do to those mysterious accidents he has whenever he's near you," added Remus.

"...losing him influence in his house," said Hermione.

"...not to mention the fact that they no longer lose house points for being nice to people from other houses," added Harry.

"...and they actually get in trouble for doing wrong," said Sirius, "They actually for the most part are good kids with ambition. Now they're learning to pursue their goals through ethical means."

"That's great Sirius!" said Harry, "I have noticed that most of the Slytherins have mellowed out a bit."

"Well anyway," said Sirius, "I think we'd better get going if we're gonna talk to Neville and Ginny tonight. I'll walk with you as far as the portrait of the Fat Lady. I doubt she'd let me in anyway after I slashed her portrait last year."

"Ok," said Harry, "Let's go."

A few minutes later, the portrait hole opened to reveal Remus, Harry and Hermione. Most of the room was empty, with the exception of a couple kissing on a couch. Harry did a double-take as he realized who it was. He then smiled from ear to ear as he whispered to Hermione, "I think Ginny is over her crush on me."

"I guess so," she whispered back.

The three of them quietly tiptoed to right in front of them. The new couple was so absorbed in their kissing that they didn't notice until Professor Lupin used his most authoritative voice to say, "Good evening Mr. Longbottom, Miss Weasley. I'd like you to come with me."

They both practically fell off of opposite sides of the couch as they quickly broke apart. Both of their faces were completely red. Remus, Harry, and Hermione all burst out laughing.

“Don’t worry guys,” said Lupin, still chuckling, “You’re not in trouble. We do want you to come with us, though.” He indicated Harry and Hermione, who were practically crying from laughter.

“Er, ok,” said Neville as Ginny nodded.

“By the way,” asked Lupin, “Are you wearing your basilisk suits?”

“Yes,” said Neville, “all but the gloves.”

“Me too,” said Ginny.

“Good,” said Lupin. “Let’s go.”

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As soon as they were outside, they met up with Black. Lupin, Harry, and Hermione told Sirius about how they’d greeted Neville and Ginny, much to Sirius’ amusement and the couple’s embarrassment. After that, Neville and Ginny told the story of how Fred caused Ron to leave a puddle on the floor of the common room. Of course, Ron has no idea how it happened, and five Galleons each from the twins assured the couple’s silence. When they reached the Room of Requirement, Neville and Ginny both asked questions about the room.

After those questions had been answered, Lupin said, “And now for the reason that you’re here. Harry and Hermione need to take two students into their strictest confidence, and they’ve chosen you. This is a matter of life and death. My question for you is this; can you be trusted that much?”

Both Neville and Ginny now looked very serious, but remained quiet. Harry spoke, “There have been threats on my life, as well as actual attempts at killing me. The most recent was just a few days ago. Voldemort is trying to return.” Both Neville and Ginny flinched at the name. “If I weren’t wearing my armor, I would have died. Hermione and I, with Professor Black and Professor Lupin’s help, have been

training in advanced defense, and we need more partners. We don't want anyone to know how well prepared we are. We want them to underestimate us like was done last time. Neville, I believe that you are completely trustworthy. Ginny, I also trust you. I hate bringing this up, but you owe me a life debt, and I count keeping these secrets as part of that. We will be teaching you a branch of magic called occlumency, which will protect your mind from intrusion. Do you both promise not to reveal anything you learn about our training to anyone?"

"Yes," said Neville, as Ginny was looking down.

Ginny looked up into Harry's eyes, "I promise."

Harry said, "Good. The first thing you need to know is that Hermione and I have been becoming very adept at a branch of magic that most people think is impossible.

At that moment, both Neville and Ginny started floating in mid-air. "Who did that?" said Ginny, pulling out her wand. She looked around and said, "No one is holding a wand. What's going on?"

"Wandless magic," said Hermione, as the two floated back down. "Harry levitated Neville while I levitated you."

"Are you going to teach us that?" asked Neville.

Harry looked serious. "We'll teach you nonverbal magic, which everyone can do if they concentrate. After that, we'll try teaching you wandless magic. If you can learn it, then that would be awesome."

"In the meantime, we need more opponents in duels," said Hermione. "As it is, it takes nearly two hours of dueling one of us against everyone else before the outnumbered one finally gets hit. That's without wearing our armor or fighting back against the professors. Every now and then an auror comes in to help us, and even she can't beat us. We need more of a challenge. In exchange, we'll train you."

"Wait a minute," said Ginny with a smirk, "That's how Draco has been having all those 'accidents' lately." Everyone in the room laughed at that statement.

Neville and Ginny starting practicing with the others, and a week later were beginning to grasp the basics of occlumency, but neither had been able to perform nonverbal magic yet. That Friday, Harry and Hermione got a letter from Dumbledore to meet him in his office after lunch. When they got there, they found Dumbledore, along with Lupin, Black, and surprisingly Professor Brooks. She was sitting next to Sirius.

"Ah," said Dumbledore, "Now that everyone is here, we can begin. Do sit down, both of you. Professor Lupin has now revealed what was written in Tom Riddle's notebook besides his name."

At this point, Dumbledore motioned toward Lupin, who continued, "This notebook talks about various experiments in dark magic that he performed, but the most important ones to this meeting are this. He found a spell for creating a new body. It requires the bones of the father, unknowingly given; flesh of the servant, willingly given; and," He paused for affect, "the blood of the enemy, forcibly taken."

"The Dark Lord will have your blood," said Hermione softly.

"Yes," said Dumbledore, "It appears that this is the reason Severus tried to obtain Harry's blood." There was silence for about ten seconds. "We know that Voldemort is still alive and actively seeking a new body. We can now also confirm something I have suspected for a long time."

Lupin continued. "The journal also talks about how he asked Professor Slughorn, who at that time was potions master and head of Slytherin, whether one could make multiple horcruxes. Professor Slughorn wasn't sure, but thought that it would be theoretically possible."

"If he's done that," said Dumbledore, "then it would explain a great many things." Both teenagers, along with Sirius, looked at Dumbledore in confusion. "I see an explanation is in order. Simply put, if a wizard wants to ensure that he can't be killed, there is a spell that can be cast to place a portion of one's soul in another object. The caster must commit a murder, which creates a tear in the soul, just

prior to casting the spell. The diary that you, Harry, destroyed in your second year was a horcrux. The portion of Riddle's soul inside it nearly obtained a body of its own." Harry's eyes widened, but he said nothing. "No other wizard has ever created more than one horcrux before Voldemort. Before he can truly die, we must find out how many he has made and where they are located."

"Seven," said Professor Brooks, "The perfect magical number. My father would want his twisted soul split in seven pieces. One in himself, and the others in other objects." At that moment, every eye except Dumbledore's went to Professor Brooks. "Yes," she said, "you all heard me right. Twenty-six years ago, Voldemort and some Death Eaters attacked a small muggle church where my mother Brook O'Brian, sixteen at the time, was at. Most of the muggles, including my grandparents, were killed. However, my mother caught the filthy murderer's eye," she said with contempt, as tears filled up her eyes. Sirius put an arm around her shoulder. "He captured her and kept her for a week. She doesn't know how many times he raped her." Tears were now falling freely from her eyes. "Damn. It's just been so long since I've talked about this. Anyway, when he was done, he apparated her to Diagon Alley and dumped her unconscious naked body in the middle of the street and apparated away. I think he believed she would die from lack of food and water, along with the abuse he gave her. Someone took pity on her and took her to St. Mungo's. They managed to help her, and nine months later I was born. She decided not to return to the muggle world, knowing I'd be magical. She posed as a squib and raised me, changing her name to Brianna Brooks, and naming me Adriana, just in case that creature knows her name. When I turned seventeen, my mother told me what happened, and since then I've made it my business to know everything about Voldemort. When I was first told, I had trouble dealing with that, and I decided to confide it with Professor Dumbledore. He invited me here to teach because he believed Voldemort was on the move again, and now we have proof."

Adriana Brooks, along with Albus Dumbledore, explained Riddle's obsession with trophies, starting with the lessons she'd given on Tom's childhood and going on from there. They agreed that Riddle would make horcruxes out of trophies, not just any old thing. Both of them shared some of their memories in Dumbledore's pensieve.

Before the meeting, they'd put together all the relevant memories they could find in order. It started with a ministry employee visiting the Gaunt house over a muggle abuse case. It also included a memory of Dumbledore visiting Tom at his orphanage, as well as Brooks interviewing the lady that had spoken to Dumbledore, getting more details of Riddle's behavior. It showed Mr. Burke bragging about how he'd bought Slytherin's ring from Merope, and how Riddle had met his uncle. It showed an interview with Borgin about Riddle working for him, and Riddle seeing Slytherin's ring, as well as Hufflepuff's cup. It also had an interview with one of Riddle's former classmates telling how he'd seen Riddle with an ornate gold harp that had a silver raven carved on it. He made sure Riddle didn't know he'd seen the harp. It ended with Riddle asking Dumbledore for a job.

"Well," said Dumbledore after they left the pensieve, "I'd like you all to think about where any of these objects may be. We'll talk about them more later, after I myself have a chance to investigate possible locations. I have quite a lot to do in preparation for the tournament, so I won't have the chance to go until after it begins. Of course, if any of you has any ideas, please bring them to my attention. Even if it seems silly, telling me will do no harm, but not telling me could do much harm. You're all dismissed if you have nothing to add at this time.

Harry and Hermione left first and started down the hall. They had just turned a corner when Harry heard something behind him and raised a shield while pushing himself and Hermione down. Harry turned and saw Malfoy pointing his wand at him. Trying to keep up appearances, both Harry and Hermione pulled out their wands to fight Malfoy. Harry shouted, "Expelliarmus!" at Malfoy, causing him to lose his wand.

Just as Draco was hit by the spell, a light shot out of his wand, missing Harry, instead hitting Hermione in the mouth. Her teeth immediately started growing. Just as Harry was turning to look at Hermione, he noticed Malfoy change form into a ferret and start bouncing up and down. Harry and Hermione, who was laughing through her ever-growing teeth, looked around to find the caster of the spell. Sirius Black was moving his wand up and down as the amazing ferret bounced from floor to ceiling, and Adriana Brooks was standing next to him, laughing hysterically. Sirius yelled, "Fifty points

from Slytherin for attacking a student! You'll turn back to your ugly self in ten minutes. I suggest you run to the Slytherin common room. You'll be reporting to Mr. Filch for detention at 7 o'clock tonight!" At that point, Sirius let Malfoy/ferret run away and turned to Hermione. Harry already had an arm around her, although she was laughing at Malfoy more than anything else. Her front teeth were now a foot long and growing. Sirius said, "Harry, I suggest you walk Hermione down to the hospital wing."

When they got there, Harry said nothing when Hermione had Madam Pomfrey shrink her teeth to look better than they did before. As they slowly made their way toward Gryffindor tower, stopping at ten different broom cupboards along the way to snog, testing how her 'new teeth' felt, they accidentally found Ginny and Neville occupying one. Upon seeing Ginny, Harry was reminded of the horcruxes and his countenance changed, and he and Hermione looked down.

"What's wrong?" asked Ginny.

"Nothing," said Harry quickly.

Ginny said smirking, "I thought you trusted us."

He whispered, "We just found out something new about Riddle's diary, that's all. When we saw you, it reminded us."

Ginny went a bit pale. "What did you find out?"

Hermione whispered, "This isn't the right place to discuss it in detail. The bottom line is that it wasn't unique. Riddle has five other objects like that hidden somewhere."

Ginny now looked like a ghost, while Neville looked scared. Ginny said, "F-Five?"

"Dumbledore thinks so," said Harry, "He wants to locate them all and destroy them."

"Obviously!" said Ginny, "What do you think he'd do with them? Give them away as presents to the best students."

That statement eased the mood considerably.

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They fully explained the horcruxes to Ginny and Neville during the next training session. At first Lupin argued about telling them, but Harry argued that Ginny "had the right to know." They said nothing about Professor Brooks. By this time, both Harry and Hermione were able to transform their bodies from the waist up to look like giant versions of their animagus forms, but it was very difficult for them to do, and they could only hold that form for ten minutes.

Time flew by quickly, and before they knew it, it was October 30th, and the representatives of the different wizarding schools had arrived for the Tri-Wizard Tournament. Harry and Hermione politely clapped, but truthfully weren't interested. The only interesting information they found out that night was that Viktor Krum, the Bulgarian seeker, was still a student. Harry noticed him looking at Hermione during dinner, so he slipped his arm around her. Harry noticed that one of the girls from Beauxbatons had asked Ron for something, but he appeared to be in a complete daze. The girl looked frustrated as she grabbed a plate from the table and left.

"Do you think that girl's pretty?" asked Hermione, obviously following his eyes.

"Not really," said Harry honestly, "I just think Ron's reaction to her is funny."

"Oh," said Hermione.

"Hold on," said Harry, realizing the reason for the question, "You don't think that I'd like one of those French girls instead of you, do you?"

"Er," said Hermione, her ears turning pink.

"You're Mine, and honestly and truly I really do love you, so even in the unlikely event that I see a girl who's more beautiful than you, you'll still be the only one I'm in love with."

Hermione blushed and kissed Harry on the cheek. Harry noticed Viktor Krum glare at him for half a second. With a smile on his face, he whispered in Hermione's ear, "Mine, what do you think of Viktor Krum? He keeps looking at you. He glared at me a minute ago when you kissed my cheek."

"Really," said Hermione brightly, "Let's see what he does if I snog you right here."

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Harry and Hermione barely listened when Dumbledore talked about the Goblet of Fire, although Harry admitted that it looked cool. As they were leaving the hall, Igor Karkaroff tried to stop Harry before his stomach started feeling a bit upset and he ran off in search of a bathroom. Hermione whispered to Harry, "I didn't like the way he was looking at you. I don't trust him."

At that point Sirius walked up behind them and whispered with a smile on his face, "Which one of you made that Death Eater sick?"

"Death Eater?" whispered Harry frantically.

"Why isn't he in Azkaban?" asked Hermione.

"Because he sold out enough other Death Eaters for his freedom. I'll bet delivering you to Voldemort would get him back in good graces though. Be careful around him."

"I knew I didn't trust him," said Hermione, "That's why I made him ill. How can someone like him become headmaster of a school? Why would parents send their children to learn from him?"

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The rest of the evening passed uneventfully. When they finished their morning training sessions the next day, Harry, Hermione, Neville, and Ginny found out that Ron had tried to cross Dumbledore's age line and grown a long white beard after being expelled out of the circle. Harry and Hermione spent most of the day studying for classes, and Harry was happy for the break when it was time for the Halloween

feast. When they were done eating, Dumbledore gave a small speech, and then the goblet sent the first name out. Albus caught it and said, "The champion for Durmstrang will be Viktor Krum." Viktor shook Dumbledore's hand and left the room. When the next name came out, he said, "The champion for Beauxbatons is Fleur Delacour." She then shook Albus' hand and left the room. Finally the third paper came out of the Goblet of Fire. "And the Hogwarts champion is..." He paused, looking worried before reading, "...Harry Potter."

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 29 – The Hogwarts Champion

“What?” whispered Harry to Hermione. “How?”

“Harry Potter!” repeated Dumbledore.

“You have to go,” whispered Hermione.

“But I didn’t enter,” whispered Harry.

“I know but...” whispered Hermione.

“HARRY POTTER!” shouted Dumbledore.

Harry stood up and walked toward Dumbledore. He felt every eye on him. He heard about half of the Gryffindors cheer. He heard Malfoy shout, “He’s a cheat!” just before falling backwards on the floor. He noted he’d have to thank Hermione for that.

Dumbledore handed him the slip of paper with his name on it. It didn’t even look like his handwriting, yet was somehow familiar. The headmaster then motioned for Harry to go where the other two champions were, without shaking his hand.

He found himself in a smaller room filled with portraits of witches and wizards. The only other occupants were Fleur and Viktor. Viktor glared at him while Fleur said, “What! You cannot be ze Ogwarts’ champion. You are much too young! Eet iz an insult!”

Harry held back a retort as Dumbledore, Karkaroff, Maxime, Crouch, Bagman, Black, Lupin, and McGonagall all came bursting into the room. Dumbledore grabbed Harry by the shoulders and asked, “Did you put your name in the Goblet of Fire?”

“No,”

“Did you ask someone else to put it in for you?”

“No.”

“But of course ‘e iz lying,” said Madam Maxime.

“I am not!” shouted Harry. “I did not enter this tournament, and I am NOT going to participate!”

“But of course you did, little boy,” shouted Fluer Delacour. “You wish to be famous!”

Harry looked at her for a second in shock, and then moved his hair to reveal his scar. “In case you didn’t know, I’m already famous! I’m Harry Bloody Potter, and I already can’t go anywhere without people gawking at my bloody scar!”

“Arry Potter,” said Fleur, taking a step back, obviously deflated. “I ‘ad no idea.”

“Well now you know, and I refuse to play this game of yours, so I’m going back to Gryffindor Common Room so you can plan your stupid tournament!”

“You can’t leave now,” said Crouch. “The Goblet of Fire constitutes a binding magical contract.”

“Not if I didn’t sign my name!” shouted Harry. “Goodbye!” Harry turned and started walking toward the door. Harry didn’t notice the look of admiration that was forming on Fleur’s face. Krum did, as he stood there silently, and glared even more fiercely at Harry, who wasn’t paying him the slightest bit of attention. Sirius and Remus were proudly watching Harry stand up for himself.

“Harry,” said Dumbledore, causing Harry to pause, “I truly hate to ask this of you, but I feel I must. I believe that you didn’t enter and I can understand how you feel, but if you won’t compete, then Hogwarts has no champion, and we forfeit this contest before it has begun, thus humiliating our school, especially since we’re hosting the tournament. So please, if Hogwarts means anything to you, compete.”

“Wait,” said Sirius, “I’m his guardian and I forbid it.”

“If Mr. Potter agrees to compete,” said Mr. Crouch, “then even his parents couldn’t stop him from competing if they came back from the dead.” Sirius glared at Crouch.

“Well, Harry,” asked Mr. Bagman, “What is your decision?”

Harry took a deep breath. “Well, I guess for Hogwarts’ sake, I’ll do it. But I’m not happy about it!”

“Damn,” muttered Karkaroff, who was obviously hoping to eliminate one of Krum’s competitors.

“Harry,” said Dumbledore, “I would like a moment alone before it begins.”

“No talking him out of it now,” said Bagman.

“No cheating,” shouted Karkaroff.

“All right,” said Harry, and Dumbledore led him through another door that was in the room.

As soon as they were through the door, Dumbledore shot a spell at it to insure privacy. “Harry,” he said, “I wouldn’t have asked you to enter if I didn’t have full confidence in your abilities.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Harry, unsurely.

“I just want you to make sure that you don’t reveal the extent of your powers in this tournament, unless your life is in danger. Specifically, at least make sure you use your wand while you’re facing the challenges.”

Harry chuckled, “All right, sir. I won’t beat them too badly.”

“Good,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eye, then let’s get back so they can announce the date of the first task.

As Harry got back to the Gryffindor common room, he was greeted by a party that Fred and George had thrown for him. He noticed Ron sitting in one corner of the room glaring daggers at him, while Hermione was sitting on the other side of the room, glaring daggers at Ron. Neville and Ginny were nowhere to be seen, so Harry suspected they were in a broom closet somewhere. Harry ignored the celebrations and marched straight toward Hermione.

He sat near her and said quietly, “Hey Mine, what’s wrong?”

She sighed and said, “Oh, it’s just Ron. When we got back here, he declared that you’re some kind of ‘Glory Seeker’ and you can’t resist the temptation to get your name in the paper. He actually reminded me of Draco when Lockhart made you pose for that photo in *Florish and Blotts*.” Then she looked more seriously at her boyfriend. “They’re not making you compete, are they? If they say it’s a binding contract or something, you can say you didn’t sign it.”

Harry took a deep breath. “They’re not making me compete, but I am.” He put up his hand to stop Hermione’s protests. “Dumbledore told me that if I don’t compete, Hogwarts will have to forfeit. He asked me to compete for Hogwarts’ sake. He asked me in private to try to hide some of my powers, specifically my wandless magic, unless my life’s in danger. He doesn’t seem to think I’ll have any trouble in the tournament. I hope he’s right. I just can’t help being nervous about it. I hope Sirius isn’t mad at me. He didn’t want me to compete.”

“You should have obeyed him, Harry,” said Hermione. “He’s your legal guardian. That means he’s your parent now! I understand you’re disobeying the Dursleys, but Sirius has tried to be a good father to you, and you’ve just disregarded his first big parental decision.”

“You’re right,” said Harry. I should apologize to him. He walked up the stairs to his dorm, and a few minutes later Hermione distinctly heard his voice whisper, “Goodnight, Mine,” out of thin air.

Not long after that, Harry, under his invisibility cloak, knocked on the door of Sirius’ room. When the door opened, Sirius looked around for a few seconds until Harry’s voice said, “Can I come in.”

“Fine,” said Sirius, sounding a bit unhappy.

Once Harry was inside and had removed the cloak, he said, “Sirius, I owe you an apology for disobeying you tonight. You’re my guardian and I should have listened to you.” Harry sighed. “I guess I’ve gotten so used to ignoring the Dursleys that it comes natural to me. I shouldn’t have agreed to compete once you said you were against it.”

Sirius smiled, "I'm glad you said that Harry. I was wondering whether you took me seriously as a parent. Well, what's done is done, but I'd appreciate it if you don't do it again." Harry nodded. "So, what did Dumbledore say when you two were alone?"

"Only to not show off my wandless magic. He seems to feel that I have nothing to worry about with the tournament."

"I'll admit that you're a hell of a lot more prepared for it than that 'fairy princess' Fleur or 'sawdust for brains' Krum, but everybody, even you, can have bad luck. I'll be keeping an ear open to any news I can find out about the first task, and if I think the other schools are cheating, I'll cheat too." Sirius smiled at Harry, and Harry smiled back. "You'd better get back to bed."

"Yes sir," said Harry, pulling his map out and slipping on his cloak. "Goodnight."

Harry got back to the common room to find it was deserted except for a lone figure with bushy brown hair sitting in the same chair she'd been in when he'd left. He removed his cloak and said, "Hermione, love, you shouldn't have stayed up for me. We've got to get up for practice."

"I'm not tired," she said, shaking her head, revealing a silver necklace Harry had almost forgotten about. It had a silver stag on it.

"My mother's necklace," Harry said, admiring it. "Hold on! If you're still wearing this, how come Malfoy's hex got you?"

She put her head down as her ears turned pink. "Er, after we'd gotten the basilisk armor, I'd stopped wearing it, but after I got hexed, I realized how stupid that was, so I started wearing it again."

Harry sighed, "Well at least the hex you got didn't do any damage. In fact, I think you rather like the results."

"Don't you," asked Hermione. "I'm sure you prefer not having a buck-toothed girlfriend."

“Honestly Hermione, I never thought of you as my buck-toothed girlfriend. You were my beautiful, intelligent, compassionate, wonderful girlfriend before that happened, and you still are. I suppose you have an even prettier smile now, but all I cared about was making you smile.”

Hermione smiled brightly at him. “Are you trying to get a midnight snog out of me?”

Harry winked at her and grinned, “Is it working?”

“Definately,” she said as she leaned toward Harry.

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The next day at training, Ginny proudly proclaimed, “I managed to do some nonverbal magic yesterday!”

“Really,” said Lupin. “That’s great! What spell did you use?”

Her ears turned pink, “Er, I was mad at someone. He said Harry cheated and wanted glory. He also said Harry wouldn’t stand a chance in the tournament.” Hermione covered her face and was apparently trying her best not to laugh.

Harry smirked, “You really don’t have to defend me Ginny, but who was it and what’d you do to him. It looks like Hermione already knows.”

Ginny smirked and said, “It was Ron and I nonverbally bat-bogey hexed him. Neville and I had just gotten to the common room and Ron started shouting. Neville went straight up to his dorm, leaving Hermione, Ron, and I alone in the common room. Ron ran up the stairs after I hexed him, with both me and Hermione laughing at him.”

Harry chuckled. “I wish I’d seen that. Hermione, why didn’t you tell me about that?”

“Er,” said Hermione blushing, “I was preoccupied.”

“I’m sure you were,” said Ginny with a wink.

By the end of practice, Ginny had only been able to duplicate the nonverbal hex once when she was getting increasingly irritated at Harry for dodging her every spell and herself for not hitting him. Fortunately for Harry, he managed to raise a shield in time to block the hex. Ginny was still happy that she'd sent the silent hex anyway, and vowed to practice day and night until she could do every spell without saying a word. Neville looked discouraged.

Hermione walked up to him and said, "What's the matter, Neville?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing. It's just that I'm practically a squib. I'm never gonna be able to do this."

"Nonsense!" said Hermione. "You're doing just as well as Ginny in occlumency. As far as quiet spells go, you just need to concentrate more. Try and get yourself to imagine Snape's face on whatever you're targeting. That might help."

"I'll try," said Neville, with his head hung down. "See you later."

When Harry and Hermione went down to supper that night, Malfoy walked up to them and showed off a badge that said, 'Support Viktor Krum!' When he touched it, the display changed to, 'Potter Stinks!'

Hermione pointed her wand at the badge Malfoy was wearing, and said a made up Latin phrase while she changed the badge with a thought. She then said, "Now the badge is even better."

He looked down to see the badge now read, 'Kick Me!' He grabbed it and tried to unhook it, but it wouldn't come off his robe. However, when Malfoy touched it, the display changed to, 'I Stink!'

Both Harry and Hermione laughed as Draco ran in frustration to his dormitory for a new robe.

"Zat ez very funny," said Fleur Delacour, walking up from behind her. "I am not familiar with zat spell."

“Hello Fleur,” said Harry. “I never heard of it either. This is my girlfriend, Hermione Granger.”

“ello, eet iz zo nize to meet you,” said Fleur, shaking Hermione’s hand with an obviously fake smile.

“Arry, I’d juzt like to zay zat I admire ze way you ztood up to ze ministry yesterday, and ‘ow you dezided zat you would compete for ze honor of your zkool,” she said in a soft, seductive voice while Hermione glared at her.

“Er, thanks Fleur,” said Harry. “Hermione and I have got to go now.”

Fleur appeared frustrated, “Wouldn’t you rather ztay ‘ere with me and let zis, Air-mow-knee go by herzlf?”

Harry looked confused. “Er, no. I’ll, er, see you in the tournament.” He then grabbed Hermione’s arm and walked off. He whispered, “What was that girl’s problem?”

Hermione kissed Harry on the cheek and smiled. “You don’t really know, do you?”

“No,” said Harry, looking more confused than ever.

“Harry, that girl obviously likes you, and she was turning on all her charms, but they didn’t work one bit on you. She seemed to expect you to drop me at once. That seemed a bit weird. But she really got frustrated when you didn’t. I’m surprised she’d go for someone your age anyway,” said Hermione.

“It’s the fame,” said Harry. “She didn’t like me at all until she found out who I was!”

The next day, Hermione was in the library alone. She was supposed to meet Harry there after her Ancient Ruins class, but it got out a bit early and Harry wasn’t there yet. She pulled out her laptop and started studying.

"Is ziz seat taken," asked a male voice Hermione wasn't familiar with.

She looked up to see Viktor Krum. "Actually, my boyfriend will be here in a few minutes. I'm saving the seat for him."

"Oh vyes. The famous Harry Potter. I believe he ez famous vor something he vould have no memory ov. I, on the other hand, know vat I'm famous for. I vill only be a minute," he said, sitting in the forbidden chair.

Hermione didn't here the click that happened when he sat down. "You are a very pretty girl. I am sure that I can make you much happier than Mr. Potter. I'm sure he's a nice guy, but I don't have trouble following me everywhere. I can make you much happier..."

"I'm very happy with Harry!" shouted Hermione, forgetting she was in a library. "I believe I told you I was saving that seat for him, Mr. Krum!"

"Very vell," said Krum, getting up, "Have it your way, but before this year is over, you vill be asking me to date you."

"You wish!" shouted Hermione.

As Krum left the library, he ran into Harry. After glaring at him for a second, Viktor continued walking. When Harry reached Hermione, she said angrily, "Did you see Mr. Krum on the way out of the library?"

"Yeah," said Harry. "He glared at me. What happened?"

"That arrogant prat tried to get me to dump you for him! Can you believe it? After I refused, he said by the end of the year I'd be asking him out!"

"I think you made him mad," said Harry smiling.

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Not long after that, Harry found himself summoned out of Sirius' class for what was termed, 'The weighing of the wands.' Before the actual

ceremony, the Daily Prophet reporter, Rita Skeeter, tried to pull Harry into a broom cupboard for an interview before she tripped and fell on her supplies, causing all her ink to splash onto her dress as she fell onto her quick quotes quill, which broke under her weight. Harry smiled at this, pleased with the accident he'd caused. She cleaned her dress with her wand, but by then Dumbledore and Ollivander had shown up and the wand-testing began. Harry was surprised to find that Fleur was part Veela, and was disturbed at the way she winked at him when she revealed that fact. When the photographer was about to start taking pictures, he too suffered an accident, falling onto the camera, breaking it. Harry and the others quickly left before he had a chance to repair it.

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As the weeks flew by, Harry and Hermione worked harder and harder at everything, including their transformations, so that Harry would be prepared for anything. Neville had finally managed his first nonverbal spell – levitation. One week before the first task, Harry and Hermione both managed a full transformation to their forms, the golden eagle and eagle owl respectively. They transformed and then flew around the grounds over the forest for a few minutes, until they noticed a sight they'd never seen before. They didn't even know that you could see this anywhere within a hundred miles of Hogwarts. Dangerous beasts, with several wizards trying to control them. What they saw were three fully grown fire-breathing dragons.

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 30 – Challenges

“Dragons?” exclaimed Sirius and Remus together at the next training session.

“Are you sure?” asked Remus.

“Hermione,” said Harry sarcastically, “Were those dragons or gerbils that we saw yesterday?”

“Hm,” said Hermione with a smirk, “They are hard to distinguish. Perhaps we should use a pensieve to review the memory.”

“All right,” said Sirius, “I can’t believe Dumbledore wouldn’t tell us!”

“He thinks we’d help Harry,” said Lupin.

“As if the other headmasters aren’t helping their champions!” said Sirius.

“D-Dragons?” said Ginny, while Neville was just silent and pale.

“Yes, Dragons,” yelled Harry, getting annoyed.

Hermione said, “All we need is a strategy.”

“Why doesn’t Harry just summon his firebolt and outfly the thing?” asked Ginny.

“That might work,” said Sirius, “but it would be dangerous.”

“I lost my Nimbus last year!” protested Harry. “I don’t want my firebolt getting burned! I’m sure I can do something else! What has all this training been for?”

“You’ve been training to fight wizards not dragons,” said Lupin. “Most spells won’t go through a dragon’s scales.”

“...and if you managed it,” said Hermione, “That would be showing your powers.”

“Of course,” said Sirius, “if you aim your wand at its eyes, you could probably defeat it without getting people suspicious.”

Harry smiled at this, “As long as I’m pointing my wand, nobody will suspect I’m not using it. The question is; what should I do to the dragon that will be the most fun?”

-

After they’d come up with a strategy, the normal training began. A few hours after it was over (it was a Sunday, so there were no classes), Harry and Hermione were in the library doing their homework. They’d just finished a history essay for Professor Brooks, when Hermione got up from their table, saying, “I’ve got to use the loo. I’ll be right back.”

“Have fun,” Harry said sarcastically. He then decided to call up one of the books Dumbledore had let them copy on his laptop to do a bit of reading while Hermione was gone when none other than Fleur Delacour sat in Hermione’s recently vacated seat.

“Ello ‘Arry, ‘ow good too see you again!” she said cheerfully.

At that moment Harry heard a click and said, “Did you hear that?”

“I only ‘eard my ‘eart beating faster for you!” she said.

Harry was getting annoyed. “Er, Fleur, you’re in Hermione’s chair...”

“Why would you be interested in zat little girl when you can ‘ave me. I’m not only a much more beautiful woman than zat little bookworm, but I am part Veela,” she said as seductively as possible, although she appeared to be getting frustrated.

Harry noticed her frustration and said, “You may have noticed, but I am immune to your Veela charms. I found that out at the world cup.”

“Even if that magic doesn’t work on the brave, handsome, powerful ‘Man Who Lived,’ I do have other charm as well.”

“Maybe you do, but I AM NOT INTERESTED! Maybe you should try your charms on Krum instead! His team had Veelas for their mascots at the game. LEAVE ME ALONE!”

“Fine,” said Fleur proudly while getting up, “Iv you want to play, ‘ard to get,’ I’ll go along, although I don’t see why you waste time vith that plain girl. I know you want me!” She finally walked off. She didn’t notice the evil gleam in Harry’s eye.

Harry then turned his attention back to his laptop until about ten minutes later when Hermione came back looking furious.

“What happened?” asked Harry.

“Krum!” said Hermione, trying to keep her voice down. “When I left the loo, he was waiting for me and tried to ‘charm’ me into dumping you! He cornered me against a wall...”

Harry got up and said, “I’ll kill him!”

“No, no,” said Hermione, “it’s all right. I kneed him in the crotch and then he had an unexplained bout of nausea.” Hermione then winked at him.

“Fleur tried to pick me up while you were gone. What? There’s that click again.”

“I heard that before too,” said Hermione, “I just can’t remember where. Anyway, what did Fleur do?”

“Oh, she went on with some rubbish about her being so much more beautiful than you.” He then leaned closer to her and whispered, “She doesn’t know it yet, but before she left, I gave her the worst case of acne the world has ever seen. It’ll last until New Years Day and there’s nothing Madam Pomfrey can do about it.”

Hermione laughed heartily with Harry for a full two minutes before saying, “ha that’s ha mean ha ha ha...It’s ha wrong ha” and she burst into more uncontrolled laughter. In between giggles, Harry could distinguish a few phrases like, “abuse of power,” and, “her dragon will

die laughing." Harry couldn't understand why she had to pretend to disapprove.

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On Monday morning, when Harry, Hermione, Ginny, and Neville were eating breakfast; an owl brought a copy of the Daily Prophet to Neville. After he'd looked at the headline, he slammed it on the table, obviously trying to hide it.

"Neville," said Ginny, "why are you hiding the paper?" He carefully showed her the headline, and she paled and glanced at Harry and Hermione.

"Er, guys, you should probably read this article before you go to classes." Ginny then handed the paper to them. The first thing they noticed were three pictures - one of Harry and Hermione, one of Viktor and Hermione, and one of Fleur and Harry - all at the same table in the library. The picture of Harry and Hermione had them holding hands, winking, and kissing, while the other photos weren't moving. The newspaper said,

*"Harry Potter's Assorted Love Affairs*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*I'm sure that many people at Hogwarts are concerned that Harry Potter, Hogwarts Champion for the Triwizard Tournament, as well as the famous 'Boy-Who-Lived,' who has never had a proper family, having been raised by muggles after his parents died, is having a very unhealthy love-life. He has an official girlfriend, Hermione Granger, a plain but ambitious girl, whom several people believe started using a love potion on Mr. Potter during the last Christmas break. 'They weren't dating at all, and then suddenly they were snogging everywhere,' said Seamus Finnegan, fellow Gryffindor. 'She's always been good at potions, so I'm sure she could brew a love potion,' said Pansy Parkinson of Slytherin.' However, it seems Mr. Potter has not been faithful, and indeed has been able to fight it off to an extent. He has been seen flirting with Fleur Delacour, Beauxbatons Champion, who said, 'The boy can't keep his hands off of me, not that I want him to,' while blushing. Dean Thomas also*

*stated that, 'Harry got Ginny Weasley to wear a skimpy bathing suit last summer at his birthday party so he could look at her while they were flirting.*

*Miss Granger, while not having as much luck with the opposite sex as Mr. Potter, has been seen with Viktor Krum, world famous Seeker and Durmstrang Champion. Perhaps she is bewitching him in revenge for Mr. Potter's unfaithfulness. Or else perhaps she is through with Harry Potter and is moving on to another victim. Neither Mr. Potter nor Miss Granger were available for comment, and we suspect that one or both of them tampered with our photographs."*

"That's the biggest load of rubbish I've ever read!" said Harry. While he was speaking, several owls bearing several packages came to them. Harry said, "Don't touch any of them!" A howler was dropped right in front of Harry that said, "Harry Potter, YOUR PARENTS WOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOU!..." and such nonsense. Hermione luckily took Harry's advice about not touching the packages, because Remus, who'd rushed to the table with Sirius and Hagrid, found a substance that burns the hands in one of the envelopes when he'd examined it with his wand.

"Crazy, the lot of em!" shouted Hagrid, "How can anyone think that of yer in the first place? And sendin' yer dem things!"

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The day before the first task started normally, with morning exercise and a few howlers from whackos at breakfast. However, while Harry and Hermione were walking hand-in-hand toward Hagrid's hut for Care of Magical Creatures class, Harry heard some unusual noise in the nearby forest. He turned to Hermione, who was just turning at him. They both drew their wands, although neither planned to actually use it. When Ginny and Neville, who'd been right behind them, saw their friends stop and draw their wands, they did the same.

Suddenly, a barrage of spells came out from between the trees from at least three different people. The students were shooting spells out of their wands without a sound (while avoiding getting hit – although they all had armor) while the enemies did the same, and no progress was being made. Hermione decided to try something different. Four

wands came floating at them from their hidden assailants. The teens ran into the forest as fast as they could, only to find four people disappearing while holding an old boot that was obviously a portkey. Snape was the only one whose ugly face they could see.

Harry, who pointed at the wands Hermione was still holding, said, “I wonder if the ministry can identify who the owners of these wands are?”

“Only if they’re registered,” she said, “which is doubtful.”

“Maybe we should just keep the wands and not mention that we have them,” said Ginny.

Harry smiled at that. “I’m keeping Snape’s wand! Even if I don’t need it!”

After they’d distributed the extra wands and hidden them, they walked the rest of the way to Hagrid’s and told him what had happened. He naturally had them tell Dumbledore about the attack. “This is very disturbing news,” said the headmaster, “Hogwarts is no longer safe. There will be new security measures taken. However, there will be insufficient time to implement them before tomorrow’s first task. Therefore I’m asking all of you, especially Harry, to be extremely careful.

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 31 – The First Task

The next morning came all too quickly for Harry. Even though he had a strategy for defeating the dragon, he was nervous. After their morning classes, he started walking to lunch with Hermione, Neville, and Ginny. Before they got to the Great Hall, Hermione told the other couple, “You go on ahead; we’ll see you at the table.”

Ginny winked and said, “If you get there in time for breakfast.”

Neville said, “Make sure Harry can still think when you’re done with him. He does have to battle a dragon today.”

After they left, Harry said, “What’s wrong? I know they just think you want to snog, but I can tell something’s bothering you.”

She looked uneasy, “I was just thinking that that Skeeter woman will probably be here today.”

Harry looked concerned at his girlfriend. “I guess I should’ve realized that this would bother you. All of my life people have been saying bad things about me, whether it was the Dursleys calling me a freak or half the school calling me the heir of Slytherin. I guess I’ve gotten used to it. As long as you think well of me, I don’t care what anybody else says. I’m sorry that she dragged you into this, and I’m sorry for being so insensitive to you. You felt you’d been publicly humiliated and all I had to say is not to touch the letters.”

“I’m not mad at you, Harry. I’m mad at Rita Skeeter for all the lies she prints about people.”

“Maybe we can sue her or the Daily Prophet for libel,” said Harry.

“No you can’t,” said Hermione, “Some wizarding laws are barbaric! All you can do is challenge her to a duel, and I don’t want you to do that.”

Harry smiled, “A duel. That might be fun. It’d be good practice to fight a new opponent.”

“Promise me you won’t do that!” Hermione said.

“Mine, I love you, and I’m not going to promise that I won’t defend your honor.”

“But Hero...”

“Listen Hermione, if I’m willing to battle a dragon for Hogwarts’ honor, what do you think I would be willing to battle for your honor?”

She turned pink and did her best not to smile at that statement. “Fine, let’s not talk about dueling for a few minutes. I’d rather wish you good luck!”

With that said, she dragged Harry into the nearest broom closet and made him forget all about the dragon and Rita for a few minutes.

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Harry and Hermione walked hand in hand into the Great Hall and to the Gryffindor table, where Neville and Ginny had saved them seats. He had barely started eating when Professor McGonagall walked up to him and said, “You’re late to lunch Potter. Where have you been?” When both Harry and Hermione started blushing at that question, McGonagall continued, “Never mind. You have five minutes to eat, and then I have to take you to the first task.”

Harry shoveled food in his mouth as fast as he could without choking, while Hermione put more food on his plate to save time. Before he knew it, McGonagall was back, so he swallowed what was in his mouth and took one last drink of pumpkin juice, and left with his head of house. He noticed that McGonagall seemed beside herself with worry, saying things like, “Don’t panic.”

“Professor,” Harry said, “Don’t worry. I’ll be fine.”

“Yes, of course you will, Potter,” she said, sounding a bit more relaxed.

Harry nervously went into the tent to be alone with the two people that wanted to break up his relationship with Hermione. Krum immediately started glaring at him. When he saw Fleur, she was facing the wall of the tent, hiding her face. Harry bit his lip to stop

himself from laughing at her. When he finally did see her face, it was so covered in makeup that he hardly recognized her. He fought back the urge to suggest she wear a mask instead, because the makeup wasn't working. After a very uncomfortable silence, they were joined by Ludo Bagman, who told them they need to retrieve a golden egg. He had them pick a dragon model out of an egg. Fleur went first and got a Swedish Short-Snout with a '2' on it. Krum got a Chinese Fireball with a '1' on it. That left Harry to get the Hungarian Horntail with a '3' on it.

Viktor went first, leaving Harry alone with Fleur. This time however, she seemed far too nervous to flirt. She was pacing back and forth, until finally she was called, leaving Harry all alone. Harry put on his basilisk gloves once he was alone, and pulled out the hood of his basilisk shirt. He didn't want to take any chances. Now his only unprotected place was his face. He waited until he was called, and pulled out his wand.

He walked out into the enclosure, and ignored the crowd, instead looking at the horntail guarding its eggs along with the golden one. He decided to try summoning the golden egg, but to no avail. Obviously they'd charmed it not to respond to that, but Harry thought it was worth a shot. He decided to go through with his strategy.

He walked out loudly, getting the dragon's attention. The thing took one step away from the eggs toward Harry, who pointed his wand at the dragon's eyes and said the incantation for giving it the flu. The dragon then threw up, causing laughter and sounds of disgust from the crowd. He then gave the dragon a horrid stomach ache on top of the flu. It fell over, looking horrible, crying, and puking again. He then made it faint. He then walked around the dragon, making sure to avoid the mess, and grabbed the egg, earning tremendous applause from the crowd. He heard Bagman's voice saying, "Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, has done it in two minutes flat! The other champions took at least ten minutes each!"

At that moment, five dragon tamers came to get the dragon cleared out of there, and Harry noticed Rita Skeeter in the crowd with a new quick quotes quill taking notes. He then decided what he needed to do. He pointed his wand at his through and said, "Sonorus," which

he'd heard others do at the World Cup. "If you don't mind," he said loud enough for everyone to hear, "I'd like to take this opportunity to say something." The crowd got quiet, and Rita Skeeter looked excited. "Recently, Rita Skeeter put an article about me in the Daily Prophet that is entirely false." Rita frowned at this moment. He noticed Hermione looking at him with a worried expression on her face. "The only truth in the article is that I am dating Hermione Granger. It's not because of love potions or enchantments; it's for the same reason everyone should date someone, because we're in love." Hermione blushed at Harry's public declaration and many women in the crowd 'awwed' until Harry put his hand up and continued. "Neither of us has been unfaithful in our relationship. The pictures in the article of us with other champions only showed us sitting with them, not snogging them. In the muggle world, what she has done to ruin the reputations of both myself and Miss Granger is a crime called libel. In that world, the solution would be for the Daily Prophet to print a retraction and award the victims, both myself and Miss Granger, a substantial amount of money for our trouble. I would be happy with that arrangement. Unfortunately, in the wizarding world, when one's honor has been as blatantly attacked as ours has been, the only option is a wizard's duel. Therefore, in accordance with wizarding laws, I hereby challenge Rita Skeeter, who has insulted both my honor and the honor of someone I care about, to a duel in front of all of you as my witnesses."

At that moment, everyone who knew Rita Skeeter from her own picture in the Prophet were looking at her. She was completely pale at the thought that someone who had just bested a dragon in world record time had challenged her to a duel. If it weren't for all the people staring at her, she'd have probably attempted escape. Quickly thinking, she magically enhanced her throat and shakily said, "Er, I'm, er, sorry if my sources, er exaggerated things. What did you say the muggles do when this kind of, er, mistake occurs. I might be able to get the Daily Prophet to print a retraction."

Harry smiled and said (his voice still enhanced), "You really sound confident. I certainly trust your lies. I don't know why anybody reads the rubbish you write. I've never seen any article that I had other knowledge of where you told the whole truth. Yet the public, probably some of you people here today, have sent howlers, curses, and

poisons to both myself and my beloved girlfriend because of what this liar writes. Hermione Granger, would you be my second?" Harry saw her nod and start making her way down from the stands. "We're waiting for you, Rita."

At this point Minister Fudge (who'd been watching the event even though he had no official duty here - he simply wanted to watch) stood up from the crowd. "Mr. Potter, you're too young to duel..."

Harry looked at the minister of magic in disbelief. "You just let me duel a dragon, sir, and now you're claiming I'm too young to duel a reporter." At this point, most of the crowd laughed, causing Fudge to frown as his ears turned red. "I'm curious why the minister of magic would want to get involved in this simple dispute. If you were really against duels, you'd have worked on making laws like the muggles have for this sort of situation." At that moment Hermione walked up to Harry and took his hand.

At that point Rita and Fudge exchanged a look that made Harry suspicious of what their relationship was. However, Harry wasn't about to challenge Fudge's honor at this time. Fudge, with a red face and neck, finally spoke, "The reason is that as Minister, it is my hope to see peaceful resolutions to disputes instead of violence. What will it take to get you to drop this challenge? Those muggle laws? What if I were to guarantee a retraction to appear in the daily prophet?"

"On the front page?" asked Harry.

"Er, I guess, yes, on the front page."

"And how much will myself and Miss Granger be awarded for our trouble?"

"Er, a hundred Galleons?"

"Five hundred Galleons, each!" demanded Harry.

"All right, all right!" said Fudge.

"Before Rita leaves, she'll show us her retraction, and keep working on it until we're satisfied with it. It will appear in bold letters on the

front page of tomorrow's Daily Prophet. We'll expect those Galleons within seven days. If these terms are not met, then Minister, it will be you who has broken your word."

"Is that a threat?" asked Fudge.

"No Minister, just a statement of fact. If you don't keep your word, then that would mean you lied in front of everybody here. You may assume that I'll respond to that the same way I responded to Rita's lies."

"Fine!" said a now purple-faced Fudge.

The crowd then applauded even more loudly than they had when Harry handled the dragon.

A few hours later, after Hermione and Harry had pretty much written Rita Skeeter's retraction, they came into the common room to find a party already started, celebrating Harry's earning first place, with a ten from Dumbledore, Bagman, Crouch, and Madam Maxime. He got a two from Karkaroff, who complained that Harry had made the 'poor dragon' ill.

The next day, Harry and Hermione were happy to see that the Prophet did print the retraction on the front page exactly as they had worded it. They were alone in the Room of Requirement relaxing when Hermione said happily, "Now we'll wait for Fudge to send the money. What are you going to do with yours?"

Harry smiled, "Give it to you."

"No, you can't!" she said, "I'm getting my share. Both of us were insulted in the article!"

"Hermione," said Harry, "What do I need the money for?"

"That doesn't mean it should go to me!"

"Maybe I can pay Krum to leave you alone," Harry joked.

"I can handle that thug on my own, thank you very much," chuckled Hermione. "There is something else I wanted to talk to you about."

"Really?" said Harry, moving closer to her, expecting a snog, "and what is that?"

"Your eyes," she said.

Harry chuckled. "You like my eyes?" he said, winking. "Ginny said they're as green as a fresh-pickled toad."

"Yes, Harry, I do like your eyes. But that's not what I mean. How far have you gotten in that first book from Professor Dumbledore?"

"The one that told how to make people sick," asked Harry. "About three-fourths through it. Why?"

"Because," said Hermione grinning, "One of the last spells in it talks about eyes. I think I can heal your vision so you won't need glasses."

"What?" asked Harry. "Let me see it!"

Hermione pulled the page up in her laptop, and Harry read it. "This looks complicated. Are you sure you can do it right?"

"Well, yes, I think so," she said, "I've been practicing it for about a week. I didn't tell you about it because you had enough to worry about with your dragon. I've been able to repeat the incantation perfectly several times now. According to the book, if no mistake is made, the patient will be blind for one hour, and then will have perfect vision. If the caster makes a mistake, the patient will be blind for one week, and then their sight will be worse than it was. After that, the spell can be attempted once more. If that attempt doesn't go perfectly, the patient will be blind. It's completely up to you, Harry."

Harry thought for a minute. "We'll try it once. If something goes wrong, I'll get new glasses after spending a week skipping class. But I have confidence in you, Mine. If you've been studying the spell, then I know you'll get it right."

Hermione blushed a bit. "I hope you're right. We'd better make sure no one can disturb us." She magically sealed the room even more than its own enchantments did. Then she said, "Let me have your glasses." He took them off hesitantly and handed them to her. She pointed her wand at his right eye and recited a long Latin incantation, and then pointed her wand at his left eye and did the same. When she was finished, she said, "How do you feel, Hero?"

"Aside from the fact that I can't see, I feel fine. But it is scary being blind. Is there any way to know whether it's going to work?"

"No, I'm sorry," she said. "But I believe I can take away your anxiety for an hour," she said, and leaned into him and started snogging him passionately."

They continued snogging for a full hour until finally Harry pulled away and said, "Hermione, I can see you! You look even more beautiful than ever before! I think I needed new glasses before we did this!"

Hermione beamed. "With both eyes?" she asked.

Harry winked one of his emerald eyes, and then the other at her, grinning broadly. "Yes, I can see perfectly with both eyes!" and he grabbed her and began a new snogging session.

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 32 – Security Measures**

After their rather extensive snogging session, Hermione said, “Harry, I’ve been thinking.”

“That makes one of us,” said Harry pouting, “I guess you snog better than me.”

Hermione blushed, “Er, I, er, didn’t mean just now. Believe me, I was properly distracted by your wonderful, er, snogging skills. I meant for the past week while I was working on that spell. I think we should keep your restored sight secret. It’ll be another secret from V-Voldemort.”

Harry looked thoughtful for a few moments. “Er, I suppose so, but I’m not gonna wear them while dueling, so a few people will know.”

Hermione smiled. “That’s fine. Let me make your lenses into plain glass so that you can still see while you’re wearing them. Remember to squint when you’re not wearing them.”

Hermione winked at Harry’s glasses in her hand, and then handed them to Harry, who put them on. “At least you made them impervious last year. They don’t even get dirty anymore.”

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The next day, Harry and Hermione decided to surprise their dueling partners with Harry’s restored vision.

Harry announced, “I’m going to try dueling without my glasses.”

Sirius said, “Er, well, I suppose it would help if you could duel without them, but you might have a hard time. If you’re sure you want to try...”

“Positive!” said Harry, taking off his glasses and squinting at them. I’m ready.”

It soon became clear that Harry was not in the least bit handicapped without his glasses.

After he'd done extremely well, Lupin asked, "How did you do that? Have you been practicing blindfolded or something?"

Harry smiled, "No, although it may be a good idea to do that some time. Last night, Hermione corrected my vision. I can now see perfectly! Now my glasses are fakes! I want to keep it secret from the general public."

Sirius, Remus, Ginny, and Neville stared at Harry while he and Hermione beamed. "H-How is that possible?" asked Sirius.

After they'd explained the spell and Ginny had tried on Harry's glasses to confirm that they were simple glass, she said happily, "Congratulations, Harry!"

"Yeah," said Neville, "I'm really happy for you!"

"That's terrific," said Sirius.

"Incredible," is more like it," said Lupin.

Once Neville and Ginny were gone (probably off to snog), Sirius said, "James always hated wearing glasses! He'd have done anything to heal his eyes. You say Dumbledore had a book with that spell in it the whole time?"

"It's a very risky spell," said Hermione. "It shouldn't be commonly practiced. You could blind someone with that spell."

"Not on the first try," said Moony, "I think it wouldn't be bad for a professional eye healer at St. Mungo's to offer to perform that spell once and only once for a person. If it doesn't work, the healer provides the patient with a new pair of glasses."

"Hm," said Hermione, "Maybe, but not right now. Harry's restored vision is a tactical advantage against his enemies."

"That reminds me," said Harry, "What new security measures is Dumbledore taking?"

Lupin spoke, "He thought about a ward to keep anyone with a dark mark out, but it would expel Karkaroff, the killer who betrayed his buddies so he could go free. Dumbledore decided against that because of the tournament. He instead put up a ward that would notify him if anyone with a dark mark entered the castle. Dumbledore would also like to put a similar ward on both of you so that you'll know if you come within twenty feet of a Death Eater. Sirius and I put up a small ward that would stop anyone with a dark mark from using the one-eyed witch secret passage. They can't get in either side of the tunnel. That way we didn't have to tell Dumbledore about it and ruin Fred and George's fun. We know you two have 'other ways' to get to Hogsmeade, so it wouldn't bother you as much. Dumbledore requested Fudge to post aurors around the castle, but Fudge wouldn't do it. He claimed that the Galleons being spent to compensate you two has taken away the resources necessary."

"Sirius," said Hermione, "would those wards be able to detect a death eater in animagus form, like Wormtail for example. I know for a fact that Scabbers didn't appear to have a dark mark."

"I'm not sure," said Sirius with a worried look on his face, "but if another death eater who has a form could sneak in here and get close enough..."

"Maybe those wards should also detect animagi," suggested Lupin. "Maybe they could be allowed to let in specific ones like the three of you and McGonagall. I'll talk to Dumbledore about that. We should do something about that in our wards as well."

"Er," said Harry, "Do you think the Marauders map could be modified to show people with the dark mark, er, perhaps display them in a different color?"

Sirius and Remus looked at each other for about thirty seconds. Sirius said, "What if we..."

"But we'd have to..." said Remus.

“Yes, but we could...” said Sirius.

Remus sighed, “I guess it would be worth the effort.”

Sirius said, “Give us the map, and we’ll have it modified within a week.”

“Why don’t we take Wortail off of it while we’re at it?” said Lupin in disgust.

“And add the new Marauders to it,” suggested Padfoot with a smile.

“We’ll have to come up with names for Harry and Hermione,” said Remus.

“True,” said Sirius. “We’ll have to think about that. It’s very important to come up with the right name.”

Harry was excited about the idea of having his own alias on the Marauder’s map, while Hermione was happy to be included.

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A few days later, Harry and Hermione were flying above the forbidden forest (in their animagus forms) when Fawkes appeared in front of them in a burst of flame, singing merrily. Fawkes seemed to be signaling them to follow him, so they did. When Fawkes led them into Professor Dumbledore’s office, they weren’t surprised to find him there, along with Sirius and Remus. They were a bit surprised to see Professor Brooks sitting next to Sirius. Fawkes silently went to his perch.

Dumbledore looked at the golden eagle and eagle owl with a twinkle in his eyes, and said happily, “Well, it’s good to see you Mr. Potter and Miss Granger. I must say you’ve lost some weight since our last encounter. You both appear to be light as a feather.”

Sirius, Adriana, and Remus chuckled at Dumbledore’s little joke while Harry and Hermione changed back to their human forms. “Magnificent,” Dumbledore said.

“You wanted to see us, sir,” said Hermione.

“Yes indeed,” said Dumbledore, “Sit down.”

“I hope you don’t mind that I’ve decided to include Professor Brooks in this discussion. She wishes to help with your training. Professor Black didn’t seem to mind. With your permission, I’d like to include her in our little group and inform her of your skills. She already knows occlumency.”

Harry and Hermione looked at one another. Harry answered, “Er, Ok. But no more unless you’ve discussed it with us before revealing any of our secrets, such as our forms, to them.”

“Very well. I’ve been informed, Harry, that you no longer require those glasses,” said Dumbledore.

“Er, yes sir,” said Harry, removing them from his face.

“I must compliment you, Miss Granger on excellent spellwork, and on making good use of the book with that spell.”

“Thank you,” said Hermione shyly.

“I must also compliment Mr. Potter’s most effective use of some of those spells on the dragon. I’m glad to see that allowing you to copy those books wasn’t a wasted effort.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Harry.

“I also agree wholeheartedly with your plan to keep your perfect vision secret.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Professors Black and Lupin have informed me of your suggestions for security measures. I thought you should be informed of my decisions. I have implemented wards to inform both myself and Deputy Headmistress McGonagall whenever either someone with the dark mark, or an animagus in animal form enters or leaves the Hogwarts grounds. Because of this, I had to inform your head of

house that you both are animagi, and she has agreed to keep this in the strictest confidence. However, that means that she will know if you have left the safety of Hogwarts, and you will be punished accordingly should you violate those rules." His eyes twinkled. "I only thought it fair to warn you before you take a romantic trip to Hogsmeade." The young couple blushed. "I believe you've been informed of my desire to place wards on you." Harry and Hermione nodded. "If you are agreeable, you'll have very similar wards on yourselves. Both of you, as well as Professors Brooks, Lupin and Black will know if either a death eater or animagus in animal form is within twenty feet of either of you. That way, hopefully, at least one of the other four will be able to aid the other in case of a surprise attack."

"That sounds like a good idea," said Harry. Hermione nodded her agreement as well.

After Dumbledore had completed a complex spell on them, he said, "The way that you'll know when the wards have been crossed is that you'll get a small discomfort. It should come suddenly enough to wake you should you be asleep. For a demonstration, Professor Black, could you transform."

After he'd transformed, Brooks, Lupin, Hermione and Harry all said, "Ow," and touched their foreheads immediately.

With a slightly concerned look, Dumbledore said, "I'm afraid that's the best I can do. You will have to get used to that feeling so that you don't alert any intruders of your wards. I suggest you practice that to get used to it. Death eaters will feel differently. I suggest you walk near Professor Karkaroff to test that feeling, er, without his knowledge."

After Sirius changed back from the big black dog, he said, "That was weird, I could detect myself. My own presence was giving me a headache."

"Now you know how you make everyone else feel," said Adriana with a smirk, causing Lupin and Harry to laugh while Sirius scowled and the others remained indifferent.

“But the pain did lesson once we got over the initial shock,” said Hermione, changing the subject back.

“That it did,” said Remus. “Maybe we should practice some more. This time Hermione, you change.”

By the time Hermione, and then Harry had each had their turn at transforming, none of them were reacting to the discomfort. Harry said, “Now, we’re each going to have to go near Professor Kill-em-all to get used to that feeling.”

“Professor Karkaroff,” corrected Dumbledore.

“But that’s what he is,” said Sirius, “and you know it! He didn’t feel any remorse over his crimes. He simply hated Azkaban so he betrayed his friends so that they’d take his place there. Now he’s teaching the dark arts to Durmstrang students. He should not walk free!”

Albus sighed, “Be that as it may, the fact is that he is free and is the headmaster of a wizarding school. If you don’t respect him, then at least respect the position. Now, on to other matters. Professor Black has informed me that the two of you wear rings that would allow each of you to apparate to the other in times of need, if only you knew how to apparate.” Smiling, they both nodded. “For this reason, along with the danger you both are in, I think it only appropriate that you learn how to apparate. That way, should the need ever arise, you would be able to aid each other. Professor Brooks has already agreed to teach you this skill. I believe that the Room of Requirement can allow you to apparate within its confines. You, of course, will not be licensed, and therefore should only practice in that room if you do not wish to get in trouble with the ministry.”

“Wow,” said Harry, that’s great. “Since, as you know, magic can’t be detected at Potter Manor, we can practice there as well.”

“Excellent. One other matter I wished to discuss is that I believe I’ve discovered the location of a horcrux. I believe it is in the home where Tom’s mother grew up. It will probably take me a few weeks to determine its exact location. I will keep you all informed. I was hoping

that the professors could accompany me in case there is unforeseen peril in the mission.”

“Of course,” said Moony and Padfoot immediately.

“I already know the location of the house,” said Brooks. “I never searched it for a horcrux, but I did visit the place once.”

“Excellent,” said Dumbledore with a genuine smile. “In that case, I’ll be arranging our visit to that house shortly. That’s all I had to discuss, except for how enjoyable I found Mr. Potter’s handling of Miss Skeeter.

Harry chuckled, “Thanks. Did you notice the look between her and Fudge?”

“Minister Fudge’s affairs are not our concerns,” said Dumbledore.

“Then they are having an affair,” said Sirius happily.

“I do not know that for certain,” said Dumbledore, “and I do not waste my resources pursuing such matters. However, I have noticed how her articles about Cornelius have been more, shall we say, complimentary lately. In any case, although you’ve temporarily silenced her, I do not believe that she has finished her assignment that I suspect came from Mr. Fudge himself to ruin Mr. Potter’s reputation. Which reminds me, you mentioned muggle laws against lying about people to ruin their reputations in your speech to Miss Skeeter. I am considering introducing a bill for similar laws into the Wizengamot. I would appreciate it if either yourself or Miss Granger knew of a book or books that described the different muggle laws from different countries relating to this matter so that I can properly research the matter before writing the bill.”

Hermione’s face lit up at this pronouncement. “Of course, sir. One book you’ll have to read is...”

After she’d mentioned about a dozen different texts, they finally left. As they were walking down the stairs, Harry whispered to Hermione, “You realize what the new castle wards mean, don’t you? We’ll have

to figure out the boundaries and make sure to change back before we cross them.”

“Either that or simply obey the rules,” said Hermione

“We can’t do that,” said Harry with mock fear. “What will people say?”

### **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 33 – Jars**

“I need a room where we can solve my egg,” said Harry for the third time as he and Hermione summoned the Room of Requirement. Harry was holding his golden egg in one hand while he held Hermione’s hand with the other. When Harry had tried opening his egg in the Gryffindor common room, it nearly deafened them all as an ear piercing sound echoed from the golden egg. They’d gotten their money from Fudge that morning, and Harry had sent his share to a magical orphanage. Then Hermione suggested that they work on the clue he had received a week before when he completed the first task. He knew he had to be missing something, so he hoped that this room would help him. A door appeared, and when he opened it, he was extremely surprised by what he saw. An indoor swimming pool, with two changing rooms, was in front of them. The wall had a huge painting of a family of merpeople. Harry looked at Hermione and said, “Well, let’s go in. Apparently we need to take a swim” “I guess so,” said Hermione, unsurely.

They walked into the room holding hands and separated to go into the changing rooms. Harry found a huge beach towel, as well as a pair of swimming trunks. He quickly changed, leaving his fake glasses behind, and walked out of the room with his egg. He saw that the pool area was still empty, so he walked to the edge of the pool.

“Maybe you should try opening the egg under water,” came Hermione’s voice from the other side of the room. He looked up and his jaw dropped. He’d seen her in a bathing suit before, but he was sure he could never get used to the sight of her in a bikini. “My eyes are up here,” she said, causing him to move his gaze to her face. Her cheeks were pink and she was smirking. ‘Good,’ thought Harry to himself, ‘she’s not mad.’ He then said, “That

might be a good idea."He then ran to the deep end, holding the egg in both his hands, and jumped in, splashing Hermione in the process.

While he was under, he realized how much he missed his pool at home.He opened the egg up, and heard,

"Come seek us where our voices sound, We cannot sing above the ground, And while you're searching..."

He went above the surface of the water at that point.He could hear that the egg was still saying something.He looked around for Hermione, to see she was near him.He called out, "Come here and listen to this."He closed the egg while he waited for her.When she was next to him, he said, "We'll have to listen underwater."When he opened it again and they put their heads under the surface of the water, they heard and memorized,

"Come seek us where our voices sound, We cannot sing above the ground, And while you're searching, ponder this: We've taken what you'll sorely miss, An hour long you'll have to look, And to recover what we took, But past an hour – the prospect's black, Too late, it's gone, it won't come back."

"They're gonna take what I'll sorely miss!" complained Harry."Why couldn't it just be another stupid egg?"

"The trick is to riddle the whole thing out," said Hermione."The voices sound underwater.Probably the lake.What is in the lake?"

"Merpeople?" guessed Harry, pointing at the picture."That's the only reason I can think of that the room would give us that picture."

Hermione smiled at him."I believe you're right.Now we need to find a way for you to survive underwater for an hour."At that moment, two open books appeared at the edge of the pool.They swam to the books, making sure not to splash them.One appeared to be a book on plants of the Mediterranean that was talking about something called gillyweed, and the other was an advanced charms book, talking about the bubblehead charm.Hermione sped read both of those options, and said, "The bubblehead charm lets you breath under water indefinitely, but doesn't help you move around.Gillyweed

lets you breathe underwater for only an hour, but lets you swim like a merman."Hermione then said, "I'd recommend using gillyweed, but keep enough with you for a second dose just in case."

Harry smiled, "Sounds like a plan to me.Do you have any idea where we can get the stuff"  
"I don't know," said Hermione."There may be some at Potter Manor in the potions room"  
"Dobby," called out Harry immediately.

The elf appeared on the surface of the water, and promptly sank below the surface.Harry grabbed him and put him on the edge of the pool."Can't you swim?"

"Oh no sir, Dobby is not learning to swim.Dobby is busy serving his master, the great Harry Potter."

"I think you should learn how to swim, but first find out if there's any gillyweed at Potter Manor.If there is, bring it here."

Dobby beamed."Dobby is glad to serve Harry Potter.Dobby is coming right back."He then disappeared.

Hermione said, "I hope Dobby finds some.I do, however, think we should learn the Bubblehead charm, in case we have to fight in an area with bad air."

"All right," said Harry.They learned the incantation so they could do it with a wand, and then studied what actually happened so that they could duplicate it without one.Just when Harry had perfected his, Dobby appeared with a jar full of some ugly weed.

"Dobby is finding several jars of gillyweed.Dobby is hoping one is enough for Harry Potter"  
"According to the book, one handful is all you need for an hour," said Hermione, "so this is more than enough.Thank you Dobby."

"You is welcome, Miss."

"Thanks a lot," said Harry."You saved me from a lot of trouble."

“It is Dobby’s greatest pleasure to help Harry Potter! If Harry Potter needs nothing else, Dobby is going back to Potter Manor.”

“That’s fine, Dobby,” said Harry, and Dobby immediately disappeared.

“Err,” said Hermione, “Want to try out the gillyweed, so that you’ll be used to it?”

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About an hour later, Moony and Padfoot entered the room, surprised to see a swimming pool, two books, an open jar of some kind of weed, and Harry’s golden egg. They looked into the water and saw Harry and Hermione apparently snogging at the bottom of the pool. As they watched with mild amusement, a minute passed. Sirius shouted, “I’m going in there!” and jumped in, robes, shoes, and all. He grabbed them, and noticed they looked a little strange with slits on their necks, but pulled them above the surface, anyway. When their heads were above the water, they finally started acting like they were drowning; only they were trying to get back under. Finally, Sirius realized that the jar must be gillyweed. He let them go and got himself out of the pool. He quickly did a thorough drying charm on himself while Moony laughed, and a chair appeared behind him. He sat down and waited, noticing that’s what Remus was doing. They didn’t have to wait long. Within ten minutes, both teenagers, now looking and breathing normally, came out of the pool and started drying themselves.

“What were you? Why were you? Where’d you get?” Sirius asked once they had their towels wrapped around them.

“I’ve been preparing for the second task,” said Harry.

“You were snogging on the bottom of a pool,” said Lupin with a smirk. “I don’t think that’s the second task.”

Both teens blushed. Hermione said, “We found out that for the second task, Harry will have one hour to find something at the bottom of the lake. He decided to use gillyweed for that, and we were trying it out.”

“Wh-Where’d you get the gillyweed?” asked Sirius.

“I called Dobby and he said we had several jars of the stuff at home, so he brought us one”

“So you tried it out and decided to see what it’s like to snog without even having to stop to breathe?” asked Sirius. He then smirked and said, “I’ll have to try that some time with Professor Brooks.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, and then at Padfoot. “Really?”

Sirius nodded, “We made it official yesterday. Anyway, we’re leaving on that mission with Dumbledore in less than an hour, and we wanted to give you the map back before we go.” He then produced the Marauder’s Map, already active. He handed it to Harry, who opened it and looked at it. Sirius said, “I’m sure you’ll notice that Professor Karkaroff’s name is in red. Now watch my name.” He then turned into a dog as his name on the map turned green.

Harry said, “Wicked!” and then Sirius changed back.

Remus said, “Now look at the front introduction to see your names.”

It now read, ‘Messer’s Moony, Padfoot, Prongs, Sharp-Eyes, and Miss Wide-Eyes present’

“You just have to press your wand onto your names and say, ‘I accept,’ and it will copy a bit of your personality into it so that it will properly insult anyone who tries to read it without the password,” said Lupin.

“We hope you approve of your names,” said Sirius.

Harry chuckled, “Sharp-Eyes, huh? Is that about my eagle vision or my new healed vision?”

“Yes,” said both Moony and Padfoot together.

“Wide-Eyes,” said Hermione. “I know that an owl’s eyes are bigger than human eyes, but really? Couldn’t you have called me something else?”

“We wanted your name to be similar to Harry’s,” said Sirius. “It’s like you share the last name of ‘Eyes.’ Of course, if you absolutely refuse it, we’ll change it.”

Hermione took a deep breath.“I suppose I’ll accept it.”

They accepted the names and the older marauders left the map with the new marauders.

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A few hours later, Harry and Hermione were sitting in the Gryffindor common room studying together, when they both felt the familiar irritation that indicated that an Animagus was near. They looked at each other, and then discreetly looked around. The only living thing they could see was a beetle. The beetle fell to the ground, stunned, and then Harry conjured a jar and put the beetle in it. He then said, “I’ve made the jar imperturbable, and also put up an anti-apparition ward around it. Whoever this is won’t escape. Let’s find out who it is.” Harry pulled out his map and pointed his wand at it saying, “I solemnly swear I’m up to no good.”

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 34 – Having Fun

The map came to life, revealing names and locations of everyone at Hogwarts. They went through the map quickly to find their location, and were astonished to see that it was the Daily Prophet reporter, and suspected mistress of Minister Fudge, Rita Skeeter.

“She’s not on the list of animagi!” said Hermione.

“Neither are we,” said Harry.

“But we’re not doing it to get stories,” said Hermione.

“The question is; what do we do with her,” said Harry with a smile.

Hermione’s face brightened. “We could use this to blackmail her into not reporting anything untrue about you.”

“Or I could just buy the Daily Prophet and have her fired,” said Harry with a smirk. She looked at him with her eyes wide open, so he couldn’t resist. “What do you think, Wide-Eyes?”

“Th-that is another option. Do you know what it costs?”

“Yes I do,” said Harry, “I sent out an anonymous inquiry after challenging her to a duel. It actually costs a lot less than I thought. Apparently they lost a lot of subscribers last week after that incident. People don’t believe what the Daily Prophet says anymore, so they don’t see any reason to pay for a fiction magazine.”

“We could buy what they have and turn it around, maybe even change the name. With your fame...Don’t give me that look Harry! With your fame everybody will buy it out of curiosity. If we make sure that the articles are true and not just an attempt to insult people and ruin reputations, it could be just what the wizarding world needs! Maybe I can write a weekly article about the treatment of other sentient magical creatures like house-elves. It’s not funny, Harry!” Harry was chuckling.

“Honest, Mine, I wasn’t laughing at your idea. I just love seeing you so excited. But we’re both students here. How could we run a

newspaper? We'd have to hire someone to run it. Who do we know that could do it that we trust? I don't want to get rid of any of our teachers, and it shouldn't be someone who works for the ministry. Who else do we know?"

"Hm," said Hermione. She took a deep breath. "There's only one person I can think of, and I'm not sure she'd be interested."

"Who?" asked Harry.

"Er, can I write her and ask first? I promise you'll approve if she agrees to do it. I just don't want to put her on the spot. We still haven't decided what to do about Rita."

"I say we have a conversation with her," said Harry. He then pointed his wand at the bug in the jar and said, "Enervate."

They saw the beetle move, so Harry said happily, "Hello Rita Skeeter! Not having a very good day, are you? I'm sure you're wondering how we know who you are, but you'll have to keep wondering that. I wonder what would happen if word got out that you were an illegal animagus. I'm only gonna say this once. DON'T EVER SPY ON ME AGAIN! I ought to just squash you and claim I didn't know it was you. What do you think we should do with Rita, Hermione?"

Hermione smiled and winked at Harry while the beetle turned toward the brunette girl. "Maybe we should keep her in this jar until after the tournament."

"As tempting as that sounds dear," said Harry, "I don't think I'd want to take care of her that long."

"Maybe we should send her to Minister Fudge," suggested Hermione with a wicked grin.

Harry laughed out loud. "That's perfect! Let me write him a note and then we'll send her with a school owl. I wouldn't want there to be any proof it was us."

"I'll write my other letter, too," said Hermione.

"That's a good idea," said Harry, "Hedwig hates it if I use a different owl than her. We'll send her with your letter first."

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A few hours later, a woman was sitting on her couch, bored out of her mind. It had been like this for over two years, ever since her youngest child started at Hogwarts. During the summer, there was a lot of work to do, but not during the school year. How do you clean something that isn't dirty? She only had to worry about herself and her husband, and that didn't take much time. She was a bit surprised, though pleased when a snowy owl she recognized flew in through her window. She said, "Hello Hedwig. What has Harry sent us?" She was surprised to see that the letter was not from Harry, but Hermione. It said,

*"Dear Mrs. Weasley,*

*I'm writing a very unusual request. Because of the irresponsible way that the Daily Prophet ruins people's reputations, Harry is considering purchasing it and trying to turn it around - to make it print only the truth, and not to unfairly criticize people. I believe that Harry's fame will probably help with sales. Since we obviously can't run it while we're busy at Hogwarts, we've been trying to think of someone whom we could hire that we trust to run it properly. There are already people there who know about printing and other business aspects of running a newspaper. We want someone to review the articles and make sure they're true and not either sensationalized or just plain lies before they get printed.*

*I think you would be perfect for the job. You've been spotting lies from your kids, especially Fred and George, for years. I believe you to be someone who will not tolerate the spreading of lies, and sensationalizing stories just to sell newspapers. I realize you've been an exceptionally gifted homemaker for most of your life, but honestly, with how wonderful you keep the Burrow, there can't be that much for you to do while your children are at Hogwarts. I didn't tell Harry that I was writing you about it, because I wanted to see if you were interested in the job. Please think about it, and let me know your answer.*

*Love from*

*Hermione*

*P.S. Tell Mr. Weasley I said hello."*

Mrs. Weasley sat staring at that paper for what seemed like hours, as Hedwig flew away. She now had something to talk to her husband about besides the garden gnomes.

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Harry and Hermione were finishing up their training with Neville and Ginny the next morning in the Room of Requirement when the door opened, revealing Sirius, Remus, and Adriana, and Albus. The headmaster was holding a clear box that contained something inside it. "Hi," said Harry as Neville attempted to take advantage of Harry's distraction. Neville unfortunately fell down petrified when he did that, and his stunner hit a shield.

Professor Dumbledore said, "If it's not inconvenient, we'd like to have a word with Harry and Hermione."

"Is that a horcrux?" asked Ginny, shocking Professor Dumbledore as Hermione unpetrified Neville.

"What?" the aged man said.

Harry said simply, "I thought she had the right to know what Tom's diary was. Both Neville and Ginny are our most trusted friends. They're the only people we've told. Anything you can tell us, you can tell them." Harry smirked and then added. "You brought in Professor Brooks, and I brought them in."

Dumbledore sighed. "Very well. You are correct Miss Weasley, it is indeed a horcrux. We obtained it at the house where Tom's mother spent most of her life. It's a good thing I brought Professor Brooks with us for this mission, because there was one defense in its hiding place that only Tom, Professor Brooks, and Harry could have neutralized. There was a carving of a snake that she had to speak parseltongue to. If she hadn't, a powerful curse would've at the very

least destroyed my hand when I reached in, and possibly killed me. As it is, we have destroyed the horcrux successfully with no injuries."

Harry said, "Two down, four more to go."

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Later that day, Hermione was on her way to the library alone when she walked around the corner to see none other than Viktor Krum. He smiled at her as his eyes wandered down her form, making her feel dirty. He said, "Your boyfriend may have gotten first place in against the dragon, but he fought like a coward. I, on the other hand, faced the dragon bravely, rather than make him ill. I would properly protect you. He only got lucky..."

"THAT DRAGON WAS A JOKE TO HIM! He couldn't believe anybody got hurt by those stupid dragons! He was not the least bit afraid of it. I could've handled a dragon better than you did!"

Krum laughed at her, which started to infuriate her. He put his arms over her shoulders, pinning her against the wall. She was contemplating which curse to give him. "You are very spirited. I like that. Allow me to show you how a man kisses a woman." He lowered his face toward hers as she brought her right knee up into his crotch, powered by a charm she'd found to triple physical strength for ten seconds. "OWWW!" he shouted with a high pitched voice as he fell to the floor, grabbing his crotch in agony.

Hermione then pulled out her wand and muttered a nonsense phrase as she willed his nose, lips, and ears to double in size while his injured parts halved in size. She then walked off happily thinking, 'How do you ask Madam Pomfrey to enlarge that?'

-

In the meantime, Harry was in the owlry sending a letter to his account manager at Gringotts about his intention to purchase the Daily Prophet, when Cho Chang walked in.

"Hi Harry," said Cho with a slight blush as she got a school owl and started tying her package to it.

"Hi Cho," he replied indifferently.

"I-I'll bet you miss quidditch this year," she said shyly.

"Yes. Hermione was gonna try out as a chaser this year if they hadn't had this stupid tournament."

Cho looked a bit skeptical. "Really? I, of course have enjoyed the tournament. That was an, er interesting way you handled the dragon."

Harry smiled slightly. "Yeah, I guess so. The youngest champion gets the worst dragon. But it doesn't matter. All you have to know about dragons is to aim your spells at their eyes."

She looked shocked. "That's all you do?"

"Yeah," he said as he shrugged his shoulders.

"I, er, heard what you said after the tournament, that you weren't under any enchantment like the prophet said. I know that's true, but, er, well, I was wondering how close you really are to Hermione. I, well, I've never heard of you dating anybody else. You know there are other girls out there that fancy you, er, including me." With that said she walked closer to him, looking as sexy as she possibly could. "I'd never want to speak ill of Hermione, but she does seem to lack in some of the more...feminine attributes." As she said this, she got very close to him. There's nothing wrong with seeing what's out there."

"Cho," Harry said firmly, "I don't want to hurt your feelings or anything, but I am in love with Hermione. You're a beautiful girl and I'm sure there's a ton of blokes out there wanting to date you," he took a deep breath, "but I'm not one of them. I'm completely satisfied and happy with Hermione, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that." He then rushed out of there as fast as he could, so fast that he didn't see her start crying.

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When Harry and Hermione finally met up in the common room, they both said, "Am I glad to see you!" at the same time. "What happened?" they said together as well, and started chuckling.

Finally, Harry said, "Cho Chang hit on me today."

Hermione looked worried. "You mean that pretty seeker from Ravenclaw?"

He sighed, "Yeah. Now she's seeking me. I told her that I'm very happy with you."

She smiled slightly. "Good. I do hope you are happy with me. Er, if you're ever, well, unhappy with me, I hope you'll talk to me about it and not, y'know..."

"Of course I will," said Harry quickly, "but I doubt I'll ever be unhappy with you. Now, what happened to you today?"

"Viktor Krum started to make, well, unwanted advances on me..."

"I'LL KILL HIM! What did that bloody git do?"

Hermione smiled. "Don't worry about it, I got him good. You'll love what I did to that creep!"

As she told him what she'd done, his anger turned into laughter. He tried imitating Krum visiting the Hospital Wing. "I swear, Madam Pomfrey, eet used to be bigger!" causing them both to fall off their chair laughing. "Trust me, Hermione, if he's got any brains at all, he will never want to be in the same castle with you anymore.

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 35 – Taking Care of Business

While Harry and Hermione were still laughing about Krum's predicament, Fred and George walked up to them with another load of muggle electronic gadgets to charm.

"You know what, guys," said Harry, "I think it's time we sold you my mum's spell."

Fred and George looked blankly at Harry. Fred said, "Your mum's spell?"

"That's not what dad said," said George.

Hermione chuckled, "At the time, we wanted to keep that secret. We didn't want anybody to know we'd been to Potter Manor, where we found the book. Harry really wanted to give your dad a copy, so he had me charm his copy to look like it wasn't his mum's."

Harry looked deep in thought. "Guys, I think it's time that Lily Potter had more of a legacy than being my mother. I want the world to know what a genius she was. Once we agree on a price, we're going to make a magical contract where you agree to give her the credit for developing the spells for power and communications, and Hermione for adapting them. For now we'll just sell you the power spell."

"Let's see," said Fred, while rubbing his chin, "Potter's Power Supply."

"I like it," said George.

After they'd settled on a price for the power spell, and a percentage of the profit (ten percent since now Fred and George would be doing the work), they made a contract that said they'd give Lily Potter and Hermione Granger credit for the spells, and wouldn't share the spell with anybody without getting Harry and Hermione's express permission to do so. The twins had half the money for the spells and agreed to make monthly payments to Harry and Hermione until it was paid. Hermione charmed the contract so that if they broke their word they would have 'CHEAT!' written across their foreheads in acne and

would be incapable of using the spell afterwards without receiving a non-lethal-yet-painful electric shock every time.

“Isn’t that a bit cruel?” asked George.

“It’s just business,” said Hermione with a smile.

“Besides,” said Harry, “You weren’t planning on breaking the contract, were you?”

“No,” said Fred, “I guess we’ll have to agree to your terms.”

They all signed the contract and Hermione taught them the power spell, making sure nobody overheard. When they were done, Colin Creevey walked into the room laughing.

“What’s so funny, Colin,” asked Hermione.

“Viktor Krum,” said Colin, happily. “I was just in the hospital wing because I was a bit sick, and Krum walked in with his ears, nose, and lips doubled in size. He claimed it was an accident while training for the tournament.” Harry and Hermione gave each other a look that did not go unnoticed by the twins, and started chuckling. “Anyway, after she’d shrunk those, he asked Madam Pomfrey to enlarge his,” at this point Colin looked embarrassed, “Y’know, bat and balls, claiming they had been shrunk. She adamantly refused, saying, and I quote, ‘I did not study healing so that I could make boys’ anatomies bigger than they’re supposed to be! What is it with that obsession with size anyway? I’m sure you’ll find a girl that will love you just the way you are.’ Krum’s face turned so red when she said that, I could swear I saw steam coming out of his ears. I was afraid he was going to start throwing things, but he marched out of the room.” At this point, everybody who heard that was laughing hard, but none more than Hermione. Colin said, “Well, I’ve got to go to my pensieve and take a picture of that memory. See you, Harry!”

“You can take pictures inside a pensieve?” asked Harry, interested.

“Yeah! It’s a lot better than carrying a camera around. It was kind of expensive, but I got my parents to pay me to have Fred and George here charm some stuff from around the house, like my dad’s electric

razor." When he saw a look of concern on their faces, he added, "Don't worry, it's just for my immediate family. My dad said that with how much their electric bill went down, it was worth the money to buy me a pensieve. Now I just have to see what's happening instead of taking pictures all the time. I think some people got annoyed when I did that."

"Glad we could help," said Fred.

"But the real credit goes to Harry's mum," said George.

"She invented the spell," said Fred.

"And it's actually either Harry or Hermione who've performed it until now," said George.

Colin smiled broadly. "REALLY! I've got stuff at my house that might have actually been charmed by Harry Potter! You should've signed the ones you did, Harry!"

Harry chuckled a bit to hide his annoyance at Colin's hero worship. "Sorry Colin. Don't you have some pictures to take?"

"Yeah, right," said Colin, and he walked off.

Fred and George looked at Harry and Hermione. "What did you do..." said Fred.

"...to Viktor Krum?" said George.

Hermione blushed, "Well, he pinned me against the wall and tried to kiss me, so I kneed him in the crotch and shrunk everything in that area, giving him his, er, 'little problem.' I also enlarged his lips, ears, and nose."

The twins both burst out laughing. Fred said, "How come you don't do that to Harry when he pulls you into broom closets?"

"Actually," said Hermione, "I pull him into broom closets," causing Harry to blush while the twins eyebrows to go up. "But even if he did, that's different. We're dating. Krum was trying to get me to dump

Harry, and force me to kiss him! He said Harry didn't fight the dragon as well as he did, and that I should be with a real man instead of Harry!"

"WHAT?" exclaimed both twins together. "What you did to that horntail was priceless!" said Fred.

"Couldn't have done it better ourselves!" said George.

"We told you that you'd be a great school champion!" said Fred.

"And you proved it with that dragon!" said George.

-

The next morning, Sirius told them that Dumbledore and the teachers were going after another Horcrux lead, some cave that Riddle had visited and tormented fellow orphans in while he was at the orphanage.

After their normal training (which was going well, although neither Neville nor Ginny had made progress learning wandless magic and were getting a bit frustrated although by now they were experts at nonverbal spell casting), Hermione told them, "Guys, your spell casting is already at least sixth-year level. That's when they start having you cast nonverbal magic. You're doing great! We told you wandless magic would be more difficult to learn."

"You have both made amazing progress," said Harry sincerely. "I really mean it. I'll bet either one of you would win a duel against any student here!"

"Except you and Hermione," said Neville.

Hermione blushed, "Er, well yes. But we weren't planning on attacking you anyway. Either one of you could take on Malfoy if he attacks you, but don't start trouble with him or anyone else! This is for defense only!"

"Speaking of defense," said Ginny, "I heard that you two know how to defend yourself against dementors."

Harry said, "Er, yeah. That's called the Patronus charm. I've never tried it without a wand. Have you, Hermione?"

"No I haven't. We haven't seen a dementor since we learned wandless spell casting, but it would be worth learning. Although that may be a difficult spell to learn. It may be better to just summon our wands if we run into dementors and don't have them."

"I was wondering if you could teach it to us," said Ginny, "with a wand, at least until we learn how to cast spells without them."

Harry and Hermione both pulled out their wands, and Harry said, "You concentrate on a very happy memory or thought, and say or think, 'Expecto Patronum.'" Harry and Hermione looked at each other, and both of them blushed as they came up with a memory. "Ready? One, two, three, now!" They both successfully cast their first nonverbal patronus with no problems whatsoever. Neville and Ginny were amazed to see the silver otter and stag running around the room together.

By the end of that lesson, Neville was producing a bit of mist, and Ginny was producing a bit more. The day progressed normally. At lunch, a very old owl managed to fly into Harry's soup, splashing it all over him and the letter that was attached. Stopping himself from showing his true abilities, he pulled out his wand and said, "Scourgify," to clean himself and the letter up. He picked up the letter and saw that it was from Mrs. Weasley. He was a bit surprised to receive post from her, but Hermione didn't seem very surprised about it. He opened up the letter and read it.

"Dear Harry,

*Hermione wrote me a letter saying that you were planning on purchasing the Daily Prophet and were looking for someone to make sure that the paper was printing the truth and not a bunch of rubbish. She also said that in her opinion, I might be able to do the job. If this information is correct, I'm touched by your confidence, and would love to try. It is rather boring sitting here in this house during the school year with nothing to do, and I certainly understand the need*

*for a newspaper to be responsible and give accurate information. I've talked it over with Arthur, and he approves. Just let me know if, when, and where you'll need me to work.*

*Sincerely,*

*Molly Weasley"*

While Harry was still reading, another more official-looking owl flew to him with a portfolio from Gringotts. That letter in the front said,

*"Dear Mr. Potter,*

*This letter is to inform you that the publication known as 'The Daily Prophet' has been purchased on your behalf per your request. The documents in this portfolio outline the details of this transaction and describe everything you now own. We have taken the liberty of making sure that the staff of that paper has been notified of your ownership. They have been told to go about business as usual until they hear from you. We have also included a copy of the personnel file for each employee for your review.*

*Sincerely,*

*Griphook*

*Assistant Manager in charge of the Potter Account"*

"Well," said Harry as he handed the letters to Hermione, "I guess all I need to do is write the prophet that I'm sending Molly Weasley there as my representative, and then send her a detailed agenda of what changes I want made at the prophet."

"I've also got a suggestion for a name change. How does 'The Potter Press' sound to you?"

"Like I'm using my name to sell newspapers," answered Harry sarcastically.

"We are," answered Hermione simply. "You have to put up with the bad parts of fame. Why not take advantage of the good parts?"

“I suppose.”

“I also suggest that there be an article written by a Hogwarts student in every issue. The parents would be interested in that. Maybe on a different topic for each day of the week. I could write my weekly article about prejudice in the wizarding world. Maybe have an interview with Dobby in one of them. We could have one about academics, another on clubs like the Quidditch teams. I don’t suppose there’s much to say about quidditch on weeks that we don’t have matches, but I’m sure something will be happening in one of the clubs. Maybe we should have a story about a different faculty member each week, and another about a different student. Then one on the general happenings at the school, and have you personally write an article every week on whatever you want. People would definitely read that one. We could put notices on common room walls and maybe even ask Professor Dumbledore to make an announcement so that we know who would be interested in working for you. It would be very good for their career if they want to be in the publishing industry. We could have them as part-time employees in a work-study program. I’m sure Colin would love to be our official Hogwarts photographer. Perhaps we could even have someone from the prophet come here to help them improve their writing skills, once they’ve learned to stop sensationalizing everything. I also think they should have a page devoted to muggle news for those who are interested. Perhaps one of the reporters is muggleborn and could accurately describe what’s going on in muggle society that may affect the wizarding world. If not, I’m sure we could hire one.”

Harry smiled at his girlfriend. “That sounds great to me. Do you think you could write the letter to Mrs. Weasley outlining those changes while I write a simple letter to staff of the former Daily Prophet telling them that Molly Weasley is now in charge and will be calling a meeting for them at the earliest convenience? I’d like the Daily Prophet to change to Potter Press next Sunday, and I suppose the headline on the front page should be about my buying the paper because I’m sick of seeing lies and exaggerations in the newspaper designed to sway public opinion. I guess I’ll have to give an interview for that article. I suppose I’ll write my weekly article for that issue, too. My main goal is for the paper to print the facts and let the readers decide what to think. You figure out the rest of the Hogwarts schedule.

I hereby hire you as full-time staff in the position of 'Hogwarts Happenings' editor if you'll take the job."

Hermione beamed, "I accept!"

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The next morning, Harry, Hermione, Ginny, and Neville got to hear the story of how the Horcrux hunt in the cave went.

Dumbledore said, "To get into the cave I had to give a sample of my blood so that the doorway would appear. After we got inside, Professor Black tried summoning the Horcrux, causing an Inferi, that is a magically animated corpse, to jump up in the water."

"That was just to see what we were facing," said Black defensively.

"Anyway," said Lupin, "Dumbledore found this tiny boat that only one of us could ride to get the thing."

Sirius continued, "He was gonna ride it himself until Professor Brooks stopped him and insisted that she go. It's a good thing she did, too!"

She blushed very slightly. "I rode the thing over the Inferi-infested water and found a stone basin full of an emerald liquid emitting a phosphorescent glow. I took a sample of the liquid for Sir...I mean Professor Black to analyze, and then stuck my hand in it because I could see a locket in the liquid. My hand went straight through the liquid with no problem and I grabbed the locket. I then rode the boat back with no problem."

"That didn't seem right to me," said Dumbledore, "so I rode the boat back to the island to investigate. When I tried putting my hand in the liquid, an invisible shield prevented me from touching it. I believe that the spell protecting the locket mistook Professor Brooks for her father. Not being aware of his daughter's existence, Voldemort probably set it so that only a blood relative of Slytherin would be able to simply reach in there, as was true of the security around Slytherin's ring. Only a parseltongue, of which he believed himself to be the only one, was able to retrieve that Horcrux without befalling harm. Anybody

else would've had to drink that poison in the cave, which according to Professor Black, would've been quite unpleasant."

"To say the least," interjected Sirius.

"So Professor Brooks got the Horcrux then?" asked Ginny.

"Actually, we found that it was a fake locket with a note from an individual whose initials were R.A.B. stating that he had retrieved the locket and was going to destroy it."

Harry looked disappointed. "R.A.B? That could be almost anybody!"

Sirius smiled, "But not everybody has the handwriting of my brother, 'Regulus Antonio Black.' I immediately recognized the handwriting. I knew that he'd become a Death Eater and had been murdered on Voldemort's orders, but I never knew why until now. Anyway, we went to the Black family ancestral home, a thoroughly vile place by the way. Maybe I'll sell it to my cousin Narcissa Malfoy. Anyway, after we fought our way through doxies, boggarts, and Merlin knows what else that useless house elf of mine let take over the house, we actually found the locket in a display case. We had to clean it quite a bit before we were able to identify it. It wouldn't even open. After we identified it, we naturally destroyed it!" Dumbledore pulled a broken locket out of a pocket in his robes. It was in two pieces, one of which had a picture that everyone who'd been in the chamber of secrets recognized as Salazar Slytherin, and the other picture was of a woman who looked very mean.

Harry smiled. "Three down! Three to go!"

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Hermione easily got Dumbledore's permission to have notices put up in all the common rooms and the headmaster personally made an announcement, saying that working part-time for a newspaper would be very helpful for a journalism career. As expected, Colin immediately came up to them asking for the photographer position. Both Ron Weasley and Cedric Diggory wanted the position of writing about clubs, although once Ron realized that it wouldn't be about Quidditch every week, he decided he wasn't interested. Luna

Lovegood, Cho Chang, and Lavender Brown all wanted the general happenings article. Hermione decided that Luna wouldn't be very realistic and Lavender would turn it into a gossip column. She hired Cho, making it clear that she did not want it to be gossip – only facts. Blaise Zabini from Slytherin was the only one who applied to interview teachers, claiming that he wanted to be a reporter. The academics article was taken by a Ravenclaw named Terry Boot, and the student interview was given to Hannah Abbot of Hufflepuff. Hermione gave them all an orientation stressing that all articles be truthful and not exaggerated or sensationalized.

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 36 – The Potter Press**

Harry sat nervously next to Hermione at breakfast. When he wasn't touching his food, his girlfriend said, "Come on Harry. You've got to eat!"

"I'm not hungry," he said emphatically.

"The paper's gonna arrive and people will react however they will whether you're hungry or not. At least if people complain, you'll be able to face them on a full stomach," she reasoned.

"But, I, I don't want people to think I'm an arrogant git when they see the paper's name! Are you sure that was such a good idea? Shouldn't we have just called it 'The New Daily Prophet' and put 'Potter Publications' or something in tiny letters on the last page?"

"Remember Harry, we are trying to actually use your fame for a change," she said. Finally, a bunch of owls swooped into the Great Hall, delivering mail. As Harry watched them, he noticed that a lot of the owls were carrying newspapers. One was dropped down right in front of him and Hermione. As the owner, he didn't have to pay the owl before it left. He unrolled the paper and looked at the results of his efforts.

*"The Daily Prophet Replaced by the Potter Press*

*By Miranda Quirke*

*Following the incident where former Daily Prophet reporter, Rita Skeeter, printed unkind and untrue statements about himself and his associates, Harry Potter decided that someone has to make sure that newspapers start printing the truth. 'I decided to take matters into my own hands when I realized that no one was holding the Daily Prophet accountable for the sensationalized and often false stories that it prints, which unjustly ruin reputations of some while boosting the reputations of others.' Numerous people over the last few years have complained that the Prophet has ruined their relationships and sometimes even their lives by printing lies for the sole purpose of selling newspapers. To justify this allegation, we have interviewed at*

*least one person mentioned in every article that Rita Skeeter has published with this paper for the past six months, and have found evidence that she has lied in every single article. Almost everyone she has interviewed, with the single exception of Minister Fudge, has confirmed that she used a Quick Quotes Quill, a charmed device that makes up answers to questions asked, regardless of what the interviewee has said. In other words, it completely falsifies the interview, making it pointless. Ms. Skeeter is not the only reporter that has done this, but she was the most notorious. Mr. Potter decided that this misinforming of the public must come to an end. Therefore, using some of the money he inherited when his parents met their tragic death, he purchased the 'so-called newspaper' and cleaned house... ”*

He smiled. “Mine, do you realize that this is the first time I read the truth in a wizarding, or probably muggle, newspaper?”

She chuckled, “Yes, Hero. Let’s turn to your article, and then I want to read Mrs. Weasley’s advise column she insisted on writing.”

They flipped through page after page of real news, including the actual story of how Harry ended up in the tournament, how he’d been attacked by Death Eaters since school started, a story about problems in the ministry lately, the section on the muggle world, which even included a summary of British muggle sports news, until they came to the ‘Hogwarts Happenings’ article entitled,

*“The Real Harry Potter*

*By Harry James Potter*

*I’m sure that many of you recognize my name as the ‘Boy-Who-Lived’ and recognize the scar on my forehead, but most people don’t really know anything about me. The first thing you should know is that I don’t like the fame. I would much rather have not lost my family and lived a normal life than have what happened all those years ago.*

*After my parents’ deaths, I was taken to be raised by muggles who hated everything magical, including me. They never even told me I was magical. They even tried to stop me from receiving my Hogwarts letter until a wizard was sent to personally deliver it to me. Fortunately,*

*I'm now free of them since they gave up custody of me to my godfather, Sirius Black. When I came into the wizarding world, I was overwhelmed by so many witches and wizards staring at my scar and treating me like a hero for something I don't remember doing. The hero of my story is my mother, a brilliant muggleborn witch named Lily Potter (who invented charms for muggle devices that are advertised in this newspaper). She gave her life for me, and that's what somehow protected me from my attacker. The half-blood (son of muggle Tom Riddle and pureblood witch Merope Gaunt) Tom Marvolo Riddle, who rearranged the letters of his name to 'I am Lord Voldemort' which for some reason I don't understand most people fear to speak, even though his made up name has no more power than John Smith) champion of purebloods was really defeated by a muggleborn.*

*I'm just a normal teenage bloke who does alright in school and has a very wonderful, brilliant girlfriend. Although some people like Draco Malfoy, the son of convicted Death Eater Lucius Malfoy, call her a mudblood in front of dozens of witnesses almost every day, I call Hermione Jean Granger the best thing that ever happened to me. Ever since I learned I was a wizard, people have always been talking about me, sometimes good, sometimes bad. It amazes me how fast the public changes their opinion. Through it all, Hermione has been by my side, helping me to be the best person I can be. I'm very disappointed that so many people believed the lies that Rita Skeeter wrote about her. I was even more surprised at the vicious letters, some of them even cursed, that were sent to her because you believed those lies.*

*For that reason, the fact that you expect a newspaper to be a trustworthy source of news, I bought the Daily Prophet. Contrary to what some people may say, I didn't get this publication as a way to promote myself. I got it as a way to help other people by not allowing reputations to be ruined for false reasons. I vow to use this newspaper to print the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."*

Harry looked around at the majority of students immersed in his newspaper, some of them glancing at him, and was pleased that most of them, including many Slytherins, seemed to be enjoying it,

although he noticed some of them wince. He figured it was when they read Voldemort's name in his article. He looked at Malfoy and saw nothing but rage. The blonde Death-Muncher wannabe was glaring daggers at him, but Harry decided to ignore him, choosing to flip through the rest of the paper to look at the advertisements, including a big one designed by the twins about Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes and Lily Potter's Power Supply (where you could order charmed batteries or outlets – anything to stick a plug into, or send in a device that needs charmed communications). The twins had spent days charming a huge supply of power products so that they could send them out as soon as orders came in. They also made sure that their dad agreed not to tell anyone anything in his copy of what he had finally been told was Lily Potter's journal.

He was startled out of his thoughts by Hermione kissing him on the cheek saying, "Thank you for what you said about me in your editorial. No wonder you didn't want me to edit that one. It means a lot to me."

He smiled at the girl beside him. "It's the truth, Mine. You are the best thing that ever happened to me."

She blushed. "Just hurry up and finish your breakfast so I can properly thank you in a broom closet."

Harry put down his fork that had food on it. "I'm done."

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Throughout the day, many people walked up to him and said something about the paper. Many of them told him that someone they knew, usually a relative, had been a victim of the lies that the prophet had published daily and wished him luck. A few did think he was just promoting himself. The most memorable confrontation was of course Draco Malfoy.

He was walking alone through the hall toward the owlry with a letter of congratulations to Mrs. Weasley and her staff when he heard the familiar drawl, "Hey Potter!"

Harry put up a shield, turned around to see Draco with his two goons, and pulled out his wand. "What do you want?"

“How dare you write about me in your Scarhead Press!”

Harry looked rather smug. “Did I lie?” Draco was silent as his face got pinker. “Your worthless slave of a half-blood father is a convicted Death Eater, and almost everyone has heard you call Hermione, and every other muggleborn you meet, mudblood.”

“Slave of a...HOW DARE YOU?!” shouted Draco, pulling out his wand and pointing it at Harry.

His eyes bulged as without a sound his wand, as well as Crabbe’s and Goyle’s, floated out of his hand into Harry’s.

Harry shook his head and smirked at his foe. “Don’t pull your wand on me, or I’ll have to speak to your head of house about you. That is the truth. Voldemort is a half-blood like me, and Death Eaters like your father are his slaves. His house-elves, if you prefer that term.”

Draco, finding himself wandless and angry, actually lost his temper and lunged toward Harry, swinging his fists. Harry smiled as he silently thanked Tonks for his training. Still holding four wands, he ducked under Malfoy’s fist, and kicked him in the stomach. The lazy pureblood who had never done exercise in his life was easily winded, and fell to the floor panting as Crabbe and Goyle stood there speechless, looking confused. “Get him!” shouted Malfoy while still gasping.

The two goons slowly approached Harry, who stuffed the wands in his back pocket (setting a shield around them so that they couldn’t be grabbed by anyone but himself) and waited for them. Goyle got to him first and clumsily swung his fist at Harry, who easily moved out of the way and punched him in the face, causing a black eye to start forming. Crabbe tried hitting Harry from behind, only to become the victim of a backwards kick in the knee, causing him to fall. Harry turned and quickly punched Goyle in the nose, breaking it and causing him to fall down. With all three down, Harry pulled out his wand and gave them all a horrible case of diarrhea. As he heard their bodily noises, they got up and ran away. Draco didn’t even bother to yell a threat at him. Harry shouted through his laughter, “I’ll give your wands to Professor Black since you’re busy. Oh, and if you try to claim I started this, you’ll be in tomorrow’s paper!” and continued

happily to the owlry, where he told Hedwig what had happened as he tied his letters to her leg. She hooted happily and flew out the window when he was done. He thought to himself that he should go flying as an eagle later today as he watched her flapping her wings.

After taking the confiscated wands to Sirius' office and explaining what had happened, he walked into the common room to see Hermione sitting on a chair by the fire. He immediately walked up to her.

"What took you so long, Harry?" asked his girlfriend. "It should've only taken fifteen minutes, but it's almost been an hour."

Harry smiled. "Well, I ran into Malfoy in the hallway."

After he'd told the tale, Hermione said, "You shouldn't have fought them."

"They pulled their wands on me," said Harry firmly. "I could've done a lot worse to them than I did! They deserved what I did and more!"

"Of course they deserved it, Hero. I just hope there won't be repercussions."

"There won't be. They don't want to be humiliated in the paper."

Hermione looked shocked. "Don't start using the Potter Press the way Rita used the Daily Prophet! To get revenge on people!"

Harry lowered his head. "You're right. We'll print both versions of the story. Mine and theirs. People can decide for themselves who's telling the truth. By the way," he said looking around, "care to spread your wings a bit?"

Hermione looked at his eyes, and then at the screen of her computer. She closed the laptop and whispered so no one heard, "I'll meet you outside my window!"

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Another week passed by quickly, and Sirius told Harry that Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle weren't going to try getting Harry in trouble. The paper was doing well. Some families like the Malfoys cancelled their subscription, but there were a lot of new subscribers to more than make up for it. The twins had gotten a ton of business due to their advertisements, and persuaded Harry and Hermione to let them teach Lee Jordan the power charm so he could work for them after making him sign a contract. Harry and Hermione were given a few things like cell phones to charm per day, but not that many. Hermione had actually taken a leaf out of Fred and George's book and charmed a bunch of communications plugs in advance so that the twins wouldn't have to bother them all the time.

It was a Monday at lunchtime, and Harry and his classmates had just escaped another session with the blast-ended skrewts and were sitting in the Great Hall eating lunch, when a bunch of owls flew into the room, dropping what appeared to be newspapers in front of everyone, causing havoc as drinks spilled and plates were covered. Harry picked up his newspaper off of a treacle tart and scourgified it. He then unrolled and read the paper.

*"The Ministry Chronicle – The Only Ministry-Approved Newspaper*

*Editor – Delores Umbridge*

*Harry Potter Attempts to Take Over Wizarding News*

*By Rita Skeeter*

*In an attempt to gain even more fame for himself, the delusional Boy-Who-Lived has now squandered his parent's hard-earned money to buy himself a newspaper so that no one can print the truth about him. Neither this reporter, nor Minister Fudge, will stand for this! He..."*

Harry ripped the paper in frustration, as he noticed Hermione crumpling hers. He struggled to keep his voice down. "I can't believe Fudge would do this!"

"I can," hissed Hermione angrily. "The question is, what are we gonna do about it?"



## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 37 – Truth Is Our Only Weapon**

“I think the first thing we need to do is have a meeting with Mrs. Weasley to discuss our options,” said Harry. “I think that Fudge has been controlling the Daily Prophet for a long time, and I’ll bet we could find evidence of it to expose.”

“I think we should run a background check on this Delores Umbridge. If she’s the editor, she must be in Fudge’s pocket,” said Hermione. “We should also run an article that points out the fact that most important news stories involve the government, and if the government controls the news, people will only read articles written to make the government look good.”

“Well, I’m going to ask Dumbledore if we can have Mrs. Weasley floo here and have dinner with us. I want to use this situation to show what a complete fool Fudge is. Maybe we can write the truth about how he handled the Chamber of Secrets by simply arresting someone who had a bad record, and how he sent Dementors that almost killed me to the school looking to kiss a man who had never had a trial.”

“I’ll bet there’s a lot more we can find on Fudge! He was friends with Lucius Malfoy! I’m sure it’ll be easy to expose the lie he’d told after Lucius was arrested,” said Hermione. “The only way to fight this pack of lies is with the truth! But if we want to have this in tomorrow’s paper, I don’t think we can wait until dinner. I think, and I can’t believe I’m saying this, you should ask if you can be excused from classes to handle your business affairs and floo over to the Potter Press headquarters. I’ll let you copy my notes.”

Harry looked uncertain. “Ok, I’ll ask, but I’m not sure if he will.”

Harry walked up to the head table to see Dumbledore chuckling as though he were reading a comic strip. Harry looked to see he was reading Fudge’s interview. The Headmaster noticed Harry and said, “Good morning Mr. Potter. What can I do for you? I expect it has something to do with Minister Fudge’s propaganda paper.”

“Er, yes sir. I wanted to request that I can miss the rest of my classes today and be allowed to floo to my newspaper’s headquarters to help coordinate our response.”

Dumbledore looked thoughtful for a second. “School is supposed to train you for a professional career. Since you already have one as a newspaper owner, I believe that should take priority. Take the rest of the day off of Hogwarts to deal with this crisis, and it is a crisis if the ministry gains control of news. You may floo from my office once lunch is over. Miss Granger is welcome to join you if she wishes. I shall make certain your professors are informed.”

Harry walked back to the table and told Hermione what Dumbledore had said. She closed her eyes in deep thought for a few seconds. “This is more important than a few classes. I’ve already read the chapters we’re covering anyway. We have to respond immediately to this.”

-

Fifteen minutes later, Harry, and then Hermione, stepped out of a fireplace to look, for the first time, at the headquarters of the Potter Press. They were near the entrance to the building, and saw people running back and forth carrying briefcases. Aside from the pace at which the witches and wizards were walking around, the room seemed unremarkable. They saw a circular desk in the center of the room with a blonde-haired witch who looked frazzled as she kept writing memo after memo and enchanting it to become a paper airplane and fly to the recipient.

“Hello,” said Harry, “I’d like to speak with Mrs. Weasley.”

“So would everyone else,” she said without looking up.

“This is important,” he said, taking a breath.

“Everyone says its imp....Oh Mr. Potter,” she said as she looked up and saw his scar and immediately came to attention. “Sir, I apologize. She should be in her office on the next floor. Would you like me to escort you there?”

"No, but I am curious why you answer people so rudely without even looking at them."

She turned pink while Hermione watched in silence, secretly enjoying watching this rude woman squirm. "Er, sir, ever since the ministry's toilet paper came out," Harry and Hermione both snorted at this, "everybody's been asking to meet with her."

"I can understand how you've gotten frustrated," said Hermione, "but it may be a good idea for you to find out who you're about to be rude to. By the way, I'm Hermione Granger."

"Oh, yes of course. I'm sorry. It won't happen again."

"I'm sure it won't," said Harry grinning. "How long have you been working here?"

She looked down, "Five wonderful years, and I'd really like to continue if you'll..."

"You misunderstand me," said Harry, "I'm not threatening to fire you. I want to know if there's proof that Fudge had been controlling the Daily Prophet. If so, I want to publish that proof in tomorrow's paper."

"Oh, um, well let's see. Fudge has been here at least once a week for as long as I've worked here. You could get anybody who works on this floor to verify that. He wasn't very sneaky about it. He was also campaigning before and after his private meetings with the editor."

Harry and Hermione beamed and looked at each other. Harry said, "Could you get four other people that can verify that while we meet with Mrs. Weasley?"

"Of course, sir."

They found a staircase that they took to the next floor. There were memos flying next to them the whole way. They looked at the different glass doors where people were busily working and finally found the door that said, 'Molly Weasley, Editor.' They looked in the

room to see her busily writing something on a piece of parchment. She looked worried. Harry knocked at the door and she immediately looked up. She seemed startled, and then relieved to see them. She pointed her wand at the door, which immediately opened.

“Hello, Mrs. Weasley,” said Harry, walking inside.

“Hello,” said Hermione.

“Hello Harry and Hermione,” the older witch replied, “Shouldn’t you be in school?”

“Dumbledore gave us afternoon off to help deal with the crisis of Fudge trying to take over the media,” said Hermione. “He feels this is more important than classes.”

“Well, we certainly need all the help we can get. Fudge has actually threatened to fire Arthur if I don’t quit!” Upon seeing the worried looks on the children’s faces, she continued, “Arthur told me I am absolutely not to quit no matter what happens. I agree with him.”

“We need to put that in the paper!” said Harry. “The truth is the only weapon we have in this war!”

“But how can we prove it is the truth?” asked Hermione.

“I’ve been thinking about that, dears,” said Mrs. Weasley. “What if we started storing pensieve memories of every interview, even the memories of the people we interview if they consent? It wouldn’t take long to teach them how to do it. We could store them in small vials. We’d need to buy a pensieve to view the memories, but I think it would be worth it. Those are very difficult, though not impossible, to alter. We could also make our reporters agree to be questioned under veritaserum if someone challenges their one of their articles.”

Hermione looked at Molly in shock. “Those are both really good ideas!”

“You don’t have to seem so surprised about it, Hermione,” the redhead said, “I have occasionally come up with a good idea.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, it’s not that you thought of that. I’m just surprised I didn’t think of it.”

“We’ll do it. Do you have room to store them here, or should we buy another building?” asked Harry.

“Oh,” said Mrs. Weasley, “I think I can expand my closet. I don’t think anybody should know where they are except us three so that no one can mess with them. I’ll just have them turned in to my office. Do you two have any other ideas of what to do about Fudge’s Toilet Paper?”

“Well,” said Hermione, “First we should do a background check on Fudge’s editor, Ms. Umbridge. She’s got to be connected to Fudge to have that position.”

“Good idea,” said Molly, as she took a quill and wrote something on a memo and turned it into a plane that flew away. “I’ve just assigned someone to do that,” she said to answer their unspoken question.

“We want someone else investigated everything Fudge has done for the past five years, such as falsely arresting Hagrid, sending dementors to Hogwarts, and calling Sirius a murderer and sentencing him to the dementor’s kiss when he’d never had a trial. The receptionist downstairs should by now have four people beside herself who can verify that Fudge used to visit here at least once a week for the past five years and have private meetings with the editor. Is this the old editor’s office?” said Harry.

“No, dear. I saved that office for you. It’s the next one down. I’ve left it exactly as it was.”

Hermione smiled. “Great! That means that if there’s any evidence of Fudge bribing or pressuring the paper, it’ll still be in there!”

While Molly was writing the memo to investigate Fudge, Harry said, “I want this issue to be free, and to go to everyone who got Fudge’s paper.”

“Come to think of it,” said Hermione, “We should find out where the money for that paper came from!”

"I'll bet Bill could use his Gringotts connections to find that out," said Mrs. Weasley.

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Harry and Hermione spent several hours searching through the files of the old editor's office while Mrs. Weasley coordinated the reporters and stories. All stories not related to their response to Fudge's paper were postponed one day. They all had a mandatory meeting where Mrs. Weasley taught them to extract their memories for storage, and informed them that's what they'd be doing from that time onward. Most of the staff, including Harry and Hermione (who'd written articles of their own), worked well into the night. They left just before ten o'clock so that no one could say they broke curfew. Others were planning on working through the night. When they arrived in Dumbledore's office, the Headmaster was sitting behind his desk.

He smiled at them. "Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, I'm glad you made it back. I'm certain that you've prepared a wonderful surprise for Minister Fudge to welcome him into the newspaper business."

Both Harry and Hermione chuckled. "Yes," said Hermione, "you could say that."

"Splendid, then I look forward to tomorrow's edition of the Potter Press."

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The next day at breakfast, everybody received a copy of the Potter Press, while most Slytherins, as well as a handful of others, received a copy of the Ministry Chronicle.

Harry was smiling brightly as he unrolled his copy of the Potter Press.

*"Minister Fudge Uses Death Eater Funds to Start His Own Propaganda Newspaper"*

*By Miranda Quirke*

*Minister Fudge has just started his own ‘ministry approved’ newspaper, called the Ministry Chronicle. ‘Where would he get the funds to start such a business venture?’ one might ask. According to Gringotts’ records, he received the majority of the funds from the Malfoy family. Lucius Malfoy, the head of that family is currently serving a life sentence in Azkaban as a convicted Death Eater. Of course, Mr. Malfoy had been a close friend of Minister Fudge, to the point where he was the minister’s guest at the Quidditch World Cup a few months ago, where he, along with several others, terrorized muggles before being arrested by Auror Tonks. The Daily Prophet claimed that Tonks was a friend of the minister, although she had never met him before, nor has she spoken with him since, according to an interview conducted with her yesterday. Fudge also claimed he was setting Malfoy up, but there is no evidence of that. According to Tonks, ‘Minister Fudge was completely shocked when he discovered it was Mr. Malfoy.’*

*We can only hope that Fudge doesn’t fire Tonks because of that interview. He has threatened to fire Arthur Weasley, whose wife Molly is the editor of the Potter Press. We have discovered several underhanded things that Fudge has done in the past few years that would make firing someone a trivial offense.*

*To begin with, two years ago when students were being petrified at Hogwarts because the Chamber of Secrets had been opened, Fudge did nothing to investigate the crimes. Instead, he arrested Rubeus Hagrid, then gamekeeper (now he’s also a professor) at Hogwarts and took him to Azkaban with no trial for months. The reason Hagrid was chosen is simple. He’s the person that Tom Riddle, who would later change his name to Voldemort, had framed for the crime fifty years before. This time it was Lucius Malfoy who caused the chamber to be reopened through the use of a dark object created by Voldemort. It was never proven at the time. However, yesterday when the Potter Press purchased a pensieve for our new story verification system (page three), we used the memories of three different witnesses who were present when Malfoy slipped the enchanted object into the belongings of an innocent first-year girl, nearly costing her life and several others as well. The witnesses were Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Molly Weasley. During that crisis, Mr. Malfoy, who at that time was on Hogwarts board of governors, pressured the other*

*governors into signing a petition to remove Headmaster Dumbledore from Hogwarts. The only reason why Hagrid was released is because students uncovered the truth.*

*Just a few months after that, after Sirius Black, the man falsely accused and imprisoned for twelve years in Azkaban without a trial escaped prison, Fudge sent dementors to Hogwarts against Professor Dumbledore's wishes. First they searched the Hogwarts Express, subjecting all of the students to their vicious effects, but that wasn't enough. During a quidditch match, several of them attacked Gryffindor Seeker Harry Potter in front of hundreds of witnesses, causing him to fall off his broom fifty feet to what would have been his death had Professor Dumbledore not slowed his descent. Did this attack convince Fudge to take away the dementors? Of course not! They'd been given permission to perform the kiss on the escaped innocent man who'd never had a trial, and those dark creatures were determined to do it, and Fudge wanted to let them.*

*Another time..."*

On and on that article went, describing several questionable incidents involving Fudge. It included evidence that the editor of the Daily Prophet had been given their stories by Fudge himself in his own handwriting. The file cabinet in the editor's former office had been full of such evidence. They also had evidence that the editor had been on Fudge's payroll. The next page had the article.

*"Minister Fudge Appointed Dolores Umbridge to be the Editor of His Newspaper. Who is She?*

*By April Vanget*

*You may find it interesting that the editor of Fudge's newspaper actually works directly for him. She is the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. We interviewed several people who have worked with her during her rapid ascent to this position. All of them had nothing but bad things to say about her, saying she was heartless and cruel, and would step on anybody to advance her career. Some even alleged that she framed them for mistakes so that she'd make them look bad. Sounds like a typical Slytherin to this reporter. What's not typical is the kind of laws she has proposed. She has submitted*

*fifteen separate bills to the Wizengamot suggesting everything from registering to exterminating every sentient magical species beside wizards. These bills have included centaurs, goblins, elves, giants, and several other species. None of the bills have passed because most of the ministry is enlightened enough to not go along with her prejudiced ideas. The funny thing is that anyone else proposing those bills would've been committing political suicide, but apparently she has a great deal of pull with Fudge, who is her sole supporter... ”*

That article went on, outlining different questionable events from her career. The next page had another interesting article.

*“Potter Press challenges Ministry Chronicle to Use Their New Method of Story Verification.*

*By Hermione Granger*

*In response to the ridiculous accusations of Fudge’s new newspaper, this newspaper has come up with a way to verify the contents of articles. We will be storing the pensieve memories of all reporters of their interviews and investigations. We will also ask all people we interview to supply us with their memory of the described events as well. In addition to this, all of our reporters are required to submit to questioning under veritaserum if the truthfulness of any article they have submitted is still questioned after the accuser has viewed the memory in a pensieve if they find any evidence of memory-tampering.”*

The rest of the article described the process of extracting memories and viewing them. It also talked about other ways of verifying the truth. The next article was about Fudge trying to steal freedom of the press by owning a newspaper.

Over the course of the day, about three-fourths of the school had gone up to Harry and Hermione complimenting the newspaper. People like Draco Malfoy glared at them, but did nothing. At lunch Harry had received an owl from Mrs. Weasley, stating that Madam Bones had come into the office and viewed many of the pensieve memories to verify their contents, but didn’t say why. The next edition of Fudge’s Toilet Paper, as Harry and Hermione referred to it as, said

that to use such a verification system for their stories would insult the integrity of their reporters.

Over the course of the week, Harry noticed fewer and fewer people receiving the Ministry Chronicle while more and more people were receiving the Potter Press. The next Monday, Harry was surprised to read the headline of his own newspaper.

*“Minister Fudge and Chief Undersecretary Umbridge to be Tried by the Wizengamot for Several Questionable Actions.”*

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 38 – Christmas Presents**

The weeks that followed were chaotic at the ministry, as they were dealing with the leadership difficulties. A few days after Fudge and Umbridge were arrested, their 'newspaper' closed due to the fact that almost everyone had cancelled their subscription. At Hogwarts, Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle were the only people that were receiving the Ministry Chronicle when it failed. The Potter Press covered the trial of Fudge, wherein he refused to provide memories or drink veritaserum during questioning, while all the witnesses against him did. The same thing happened to Umbridge. In the end, Fudge was sentenced to ten years in Azkaban while Umbridge was sentenced to five. Amelia Bones became acting Minister of Magic until elections could be held at the end of January.

Training progressed for the quartet. Both Neville and Ginny were able to conjure a patronus before the term ended. Neville's was a toad and Ginny's was a cat. Neville was embarrassed by his patronum, but was reassured that it would do the same job as a dragon patronum.

A Yule Ball was announced, and Harry was informed that the champions and their dates would be the first people dancing at the event. Harry had no problem getting Hermione to be his date, and he soon found out Neville was going with Ginny. Hermione insisted that she teach Harry how to dance so that they don't look like idiots during the ball.

After the first dancing lesson, Hermione's feet had to be soaked in a yellow solution of strained and pickled murtlap tentacles because of how much Harry had stepped on them. She still insisted on continuing the lessons, and by Christmas, she was confident that Harry would dance fine.

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On Christmas morning Dobby popped from the manor to Hogwarts to visit Harry, Sirius, Remus, and Hermione. He first stopped by Harry's bed, waking him up, and gave him a present – a pair of socks. One of them had a pattern of snitches and brooms; the other had a pattern of newspapers.

Dobby said, "Dobby is thanking Harry Potter sir for sending Dobby his present," Dobby started crying, "Never before has Dobby received a Christmas present from a wizard! Harry Potter has given Dobby a full set of clothes, and Winky is being grateful as well for the present you is giving her, but she is crying too much. She is never receiving a Christmas present from Mr. Crouch, and is feeling guilty for believing that Harry Potter is being a better master than Mr. Crouch. Dobby is grateful for his presents, but the store is cheating Harry Potter. Both socks is being the same."

Neville, who heard the conversation, said, "That's all right Dobby. I'll give you another pair of socks, so you can switch them and have two pairs."

"Dobby is knowing that you must be a great wizard for being friends with Harry Potter, but Dobby is not knowing you is being almost as kind as his master," said the elf, with tears in his eyes.

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Harry had received some nice presents from several people, but what stood out the most for him was what he received from the Granger family. Adam and Marissa had sent him some action movie DVDs to watch on his laptop. Hermione had given him an obviously expensive silver watch that had a normal time display on its face, but it could be opened up to show a miniature version of Mrs. Weasley's clock, and already had hands for Hermione and her parents on it. He briefly looked at the instructions and noticed that the watch's alarm goes off if one of the hands goes to mortal peril. He also noted that the watch is charmed to be unbreakable (even unscratchable) and waterproof.

He put on his new socks, Weasley jumper, and watch (along with other appropriate clothes such as pants), and walked downstairs. Before he got all the way down the stairs, he was greeted by Hermione with an affectionate kiss. When they separated, Harry happily said, "Happy Christmas, Hermione! Thanks for the watch! I'll have to call up your parents and thank them for their gift."

At that moment, Fred and George approached Harry and Hermione, looking overwhelmed. "Happy..." said Fred.

“Christmas,” said George.

“We’ve just received.”

“A cell phone to charm.”

“From what must be.”

“Every muggleborn witch and wizard.”

“On the continent.”

“We would really appreciate it.”

“If you’d sell us the charm.”

“For them.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other and grinned. Hermione took a deep breath. “Ok, we’ll make a contract like last time. You may want Lee here for this.”

“We’ll also help you for a few hours if you like,” said Harry, “but only a few.”

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Exactly two hours later, Harry and Hermione left the common room for a walk around the grounds. Hermione said, “I didn’t get the chance to thank you for the pensieve. I know it must have been expensive. How did you know that I’ve always wanted one?”

Harry shrugged. “Well, I thought that someone as brilliant as you, who knows so much about so many things, probably would want one of those.”

Hermione blushed. “Th-Thank you, Harry. But I’m not so brilliant. I just...”

Harry put his right index finger on her lips. “You are brilliant. End of discussion.” He then removed his finger and proceeded to kiss her thoroughly.

Harry thought he would pass out when he saw how beautiful Hermione looked as she descended the stairs into the common room for the Yule Ball. He walked up to her and took her hand. "You-You look even more beautiful than ever," he stuttered, "I-I, er, didn't think that was possible."

Her smile made him feel very light-headed. "Thanks Harry. You look very nice yourself." Harry was wearing dark green dress robes that matched his eyes, and Hermione was wearing an elegant gown that matched his robes.

At that moment, a very miserable-looking Ron walked slowly down the stairs in ugly dress-robies that Harry felt should be burned. "You'd think mum would send me nice robes with all the money she's making at the newspaper, but NOOOO! She wants to save it up for a bloody new set of furniture at the Burrow! I told her I'd keep my old bed if I could have decent robes, but she said I needed a new bed the same as everyone else! She says next year I can get new clothes!"

"Well," said Hermione, obviously trying hard not to laugh at Ron's purple robes, which now matched his face, "You'll have to make the best of things, I suppose. I never asked you who your date is."

Ron looked down and muttered something unintelligible. Before Hermione could question what he'd said, Ginny came walking down the stairs to be greeted by Neville. Harry smiled and said, "Ginny, you look really nice. Doesn't she Ron?"

Ron looked at Ginny's brand-new-looking amber gown in shock. "Where'd you get that dress?" he asked accusingly.

"I ordered material with money mum sent me. What are you doing here? I thought the dance was for only fourth years and above. You're in third year. Did you get a date with a fourth year Slytherin or something? I know you didn't get a Gryffindor girl from my year to go with you."

Ron looked down and said angrily, "McGonagall said that I could go because I was old enough and my grades were pretty good, even though I'm in third year, and NO, alright! I didn't get a date!"

"That's fine," said Harry, "I'm sure lots of girls will dance with you." Harry had his fingers crossed as he made that last statement.

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When they arrived at the Great Hall, Harry and Hermione were led up to the round table where the champions and partners were to sit, along with the judges of the tournament. Viktor Krum silently glared at Hermione, until he saw her and Harry start to chuckle at him. Percy immediately joined them, bragging about his promotion, and how wonderful Mr. Crouch is. Hermione interrupted Percy. "Mr. Crouch is a mean, heartless man who put Sirius Black in Azkaban without a trial, tried to hex your brother, mistreats his house elves, and wears a moustache that makes him look like Adolf Hitler!"

Percy flinched at the way Hermione put down his idol. He raised his voice just a bit. "Mr. Crouch has had a distinguished career and is worthy of respect, Miss Granger!"

"Actually Mr. Weasley," said Dumbledore, who was sitting nearby, "I believe you are the only person in the wizarding world who believes that. Before Voldemort was vanquished, Mr. Crouch was as cruel as Death Eaters, giving aurors the right to use unforgivable curses. His career plummeted and he lost most people's respect when his own son turned out to be a Death Eater. After he disowned his son and sent him to Azkaban, many felt he should have left the Ministry completely instead of just being demoted. The only reason he hasn't been fired is because they can't find a specific reason to fire him."

Percy stared at Dumbledore in utter shock. "Mr. Crouch's son is, is a Death Eater?"

"Was a Death Eater. I'm afraid he died in Azkaban several years ago, not long after he was put there."

Percy looked down at the table. "Well, with Mr. Fudge and Ms. Umbridge disgraced, and now this, who can I believe in?"

Albus looked Percy in the eye. "Don't just blindly trust anybody. The reason Mr. Potter bought the Daily Prophet was because we couldn't trust what was in the newspaper. That's the whole point of their story verification system. Just because someone is in authority doesn't make them right all the time. I'm headmaster here, but I've made my share of blunders. The former Minister of Magic did much worse than just make blunders. There were several people who blindly trusted him. You need to trust your own sense of right and wrong, and find out the facts before taking anybody's side. You have to have the courage to do what's right, no matter who is against you."

At that moment, the Weird Sisters trooped onto the stage, so Harry turned to Hermione and said, "May I have this dance?"

"Absolutely," she said.

They walked onto the brightly lit dance floor and began waltzing, just as they'd practiced. Before anybody beside the champions had joined, Harry whispered, "Watch Viktor."

At that moment, Krum clumsily tripped on his partner's feet, causing them both to fall on the floor. Several people laughed. Hermione hissed, "You shouldn't have done that. He's been punished enough!"

"Not by me! He attacked my girlfriend and I never got him back for it. I figure I should at least be able to have a little fun with him."

"Well, I suppose," said Hermione with a smirk.

As they chuckled softly he noticed Sirius nod at him with a broad grin as he and Adrianna Brooks walked onto the dance floor. After several dances, they took a break and got some punch. They noticed Ron sitting at a table alone looking miserable. "Maybe we can talk Ginny into dancing with him," suggested Harry.

Hermione chuckled, "That's so mean. But I don't think she's available anyway."

Hermione pointed toward a door where Harry saw Neville and Ginny walking hand in hand, 'either to talk or snog – or both,' thought Harry.

“Maybe McGonagall will dance with him,” Harry said, earning a slap in the arm from his girlfriend.

“Maybe I should dance with him,” suggested Hermione. “Would it bother you, Hero?”

Harry took a deep breath. “Well Mine, truthfully I’d love to keep you to myself all evening, but if you think you should dance with Ron, I won’t stop you.”

She squeezed Harry’s hand. “If you want, you can find a partner for the next dance while I ask Ron.” She kissed his cheek and walked toward Ron.

Harry looked around thinking, ‘Who do I want to dance with...besides Hermione?’

He saw a redhead from Hufflepuff he recognized as Susan Bones sitting alone crying. He decided to walk up to her. “Er, hi Susan. Are you alright?”

She looked up for a second and then started wiping her eyes. “Oh, well, I’ve got a cold. Where’s Hermione Granger?”

Harry said, “Ron Weasley couldn’t find a date so she wanted to try to cheer him up by dancing one song with him. She suggested I find a partner for this dance. What do you say? Would you like to dance?” He held out his hand to her.

She smiled and took his hand. “I’d love to.” They walked to the dance floor and began waltzing.

“You’re very good at this,” Harry said after about fifteen seconds.

“Thanks,” Susan said.

“Now, tell me what’s really bothering you. I know you don’t have a cold.”

She kept dancing, but looked down. “I found out that the boy I came with wanted me to get my auntie to do his family a favor.”

Harry was confused for a second until it clicked. "Amelia Bones?" Susan nodded.

"I can't believe it. I thought he liked me for me, not my family."

Harry half-smiled. "Welcome to my world."

She looked up at the Boy-Who-Lived and realized what he meant. "That must be awful to have so many people wanting to meet you all the time!"

He nodded his head. "I'm getting used to it now, but I'll never forget the first time I stepped into the Leaky Cauldron. Everybody stopped what they were doing and started shaking my hand. The first time I rode the Hogwarts Express, Draco Malfoy tried to make friends with me. It still hasn't stopped. Do you know about twelve different girls asked me to the ball even though I'm dating Hermione?"

Susan chuckled. "Only twelve? You must be losing your touch."

"Maybe so. Anyway, I've learned to be very careful about who I trust."

"I guess I need to do that too, huh?" asked Susan.

"Yeah, I guess so. Do you think you could do me a favor and ask Ron to dance after this song?"

Susan looked at Ron and Hermione on the dance floor. "What is he doing in those ghastly robes?"

Harry chuckled. "He hates them too. Just, as a personal favor to me, dance with him one time?"

"Oh, all right. How could I say no to the Boy-Who-Lived?" They finished the song and Susan kissed Harry on the cheek saying, "Thanks for understanding."

Harry said, "You're welcome," and walked toward Hermione with Susan following. He asked Hermione, "May I have this dance?" and she took his hand and started dancing.

Hermione smiled at Harry. "I noticed Susan kissing you on the cheek. Should I be worried?"

Harry paled, "No, I swear, you have nothing to worry about, Mine. I'm in love with you."

Hermione giggled slightly. "I know, Hero. I also noticed she was crying before you walked up to her and now she's smiling. What was wrong?"

"Whatever git she came with, probably a Slytherin, only asked her here because he wanted to get Amelia Bones to do a favor for his family. She's learning what it's like for people to pretend to like you because of your status instead of personality."

"Something you can relate to a lot." Mine took a deep breath. "You are the nicest guy in the world to help a girl who's not even your date. I'll bet you're the reason she's dancing with Ron right now, too."

"Well, yeah I asked her to. I..."

"You are gonna be snogged out of your mind once this song's over."

He looked at her in surprise. "Not that I'm complaining, but why?"

"For being so caring. In one dance, you helped two people who really aren't close friends with you. And you think it's the normal thing to do. Oh, by the way, her date wasn't a Slytherin. He's a boy from Ravenclaw named Michael something."

Once the song ended, Hermione practically dragged Harry out of the Great Hall and behind a bush, where she started kissing him passionately. However, just a few seconds after they started kissing, they felt the personal ward that said a Death Eater was near. They separated. Harry whispered, "It might be Karkaroff. Put up a shield anyway."

"No, he's too far away. Someone is..."

"Crucio!" came a voice Harry was really getting sick of. Both Hero and Mine dived without looking to see who it was aimed at. Once Harry

saw Snape, he reached one hand toward his wand for show as Snape's new wand floated out of his hand. "Get her!" shouted Snape, distracting Harry from the greasy git long enough for Snape to portkey away.

Harry counted eight others that Hermione was beginning to struggle with so he joined her. He then noticed other people firing at the attackers. Within a minute, all eight of them were down. Harry glanced to see who was helping, and was pleased to see it was Neville and Ginny. He also noticed that they had an audience, and was glad he'd been holding his wand. He also noted that Hermione was holding hers. "Are you all right, Hermione?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine."

At that moment, Sirius, Lupin, Brooks, and Dumbledore burst through the doors brandishing their wands. Harry held back his laughter. "Er, guys, I mean, professors, you're a bit too late for the fun. You could dispose of these people though. I don't think they're actually Death Eaters. Snape came with them, but he escaped again. You really need to do something about the security here. You can't even sneak off for a good snog without getting attacked!" At that point, almost everyone there started laughing hysterically. Even Dumbledore looked amused. Sirius, Remus, and Adrianna were doing a very poor job of holding back their laughter. Only McGonagall, who'd followed them, looked unhappy, although Harry could swear he saw laughter in her eyes.

Hermione then said loudly in a very serious tone of voice, "We should stick to broom cupboards from now on," causing the old Marauders, along with Adrianna, to lose control and join in the laughter.

Just as the laughter started dying down, Ron came out holding Susan's hand and asked, "What happened?"

Harry made sure this attack was covered in the next day's Potter Press, and included both his and Hermione's quotes about snogging near the end. The article wasn't downing Hogwarts, just reporting the facts, mentioning the new wards that were the reason teachers arrived so quickly. After they'd been questioned under Veritaserum, it turned out that the eight captured attackers had been put under the

Imperius Curse by Snape, so they were released. Neville and Ginny were highly praised in the article, which included an interview with Potter, Granger, Weasley, and Longbottom.

As Harry placed the new wand he'd taken from Snape into his trunk, he said, "At least Snape gave me a Christmas present."

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 39 – Love**

The staff spent the rest of Christmas break trying to make the castle more secure, and trying to figure out how Snape knew when and where to find Harry and Hermione. Harry had suggested that, “Maybe he just figured we’d come out there to snog at some point, so he was waiting for us.”

Hermione disagreed. She didn’t think Snape would wait out there all night risking discovery on a hunch that they’d snog at that particular place in the castle. “We could’ve easily chosen a broom closet instead, or even had an argument and gone straight to Gryffindor tower.” Lupin, Black, Brooks, and Dumbledore agreed with Hermione, and believed that there was a spy at Hogwarts. Padfoot thought it would most likely be someone from his house, so he said he’d try to see what he could find. There were too many people coming and going at the dance for the memory to be very helpful to the investigation.

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Harry and Hermione flew in their forms around the grounds of Hogwarts for fun a few times during the holidays. They even spotted Ron taking a walk with Susan Bones once while flying. When they’d changed back, Hermione asked, “Did you have any idea that Ron and Susan would start dating when you asked her to dance with him?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I thought he might be attracted to her red hair, but that’s about it. I had no idea she’d end up liking him. I practically had to beg her to dance with Ron.”

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True to Harry’s prediction, on January 1st, Fleur’s terrible acne cleared up, and soon she was back to her old arrogant self, going Harry-hunting. She still had no idea that it was Harry who had cursed her.

Just before school started, Harry and Hermione celebrated their one year anniversary with a private romantic dinner in the Room of Requirement. They had agreed not to buy each other gifts since it

was so soon after Christmas, but each of them did something special. Harry conjured a single rose for Hermione, while she gave him a picture she'd taken in her pensieve of their first kiss.

A few days after school had started, Harry had gone up to the Head table during dinner to ask Sirius about a homework assignment from his class. On his way back, as he was passing the Ravenclaw table, Fleur, who was sitting there, put on her most charming smile and batted her eyelashes at Harry, who wasn't even paying attention.

“Arry,” she said in her most seductive voice, “Why don’ you sit ‘ere with me?” She patted the seat next to her. “I ‘ave not had ze chance to compliment ‘ow you did against ze dragon.”

“Er,” said Harry, “I’ve got to go back to my girlfriend. I’ll see you.”

Harry barely heard Fleur whisper to herself, “This iz not pozzible! ‘ow can ‘e resist?” Her face then turned mean as she stared at him icily. She then shouted for all the school to hear. “I VILL NOT ACCOMPANY YOU TO ‘OGSMEADE! YOU ‘AVE A GIRLFRIEND! HOW COULD YOU CHEAT ON ‘ER LIKE THAT!”

Harry didn’t know what to do. He realised that even if he argued, his reputation was still ruined. He figured Hermione would believe him, and that’s all that mattered. He walked intently toward the Gryffindor table despite everyone staring at him, keeping his face as expressionless as possible.

Before he’d taken five steps, he heard Cho Chang’s voice shouting, “That’s a lie!” He turned around to see her standing up. “Fleur just asked Harry to join her and he turned her down flat and said he needed to get back to Hermione! I heard the whole thing, and if you ask any Ravenclaw sitting around this part of the table, they’ll tell you the same thing!”

“Miss Chang!” said Professor Flitwick, “The Great Hall isn’t for you to make public announcements about people’s love lives! Ten points from Ravenclaw!”

“It’s well worth it to stop someone from unjustly ruining someone’s reputation,” said Cho as she sat down.

Harry smiled at her and continued on toward his seat as everyone stared at Cho Chang, including her boyfriend Cedric Diggory. As he sat down next to Hermione, he was facing the other tables, and noticed Madam Maxime was standing next to Fleur with an angry expression on her face. He watched as the part-veela followed her Headmistress out the doors with a worried expression on her face. "Hi Hermione," Harry said, "Sorry I took so long."

Harry finally turned to look his girlfriend in the face. He was glad to see she looked amused. "It's all right. At least some entertainment was provided. I must admit I was surprised that Cho stood up for you."

"So was I. I can't believe Flitwick took points from her! She was only trying to help me."

The weeks went by quickly, and both Fleur and Viktor avoided Harry and Hermione. Soon the lake was unfrozen, and Harry (with Hermione) used some of his extra gillyweed to explore the Black Lake ahead of time. One thing they noticed that they hadn't in the swimming pool was that the cold water seemed to warm up as the gillyweed took affect. They took note of where the grindylows were located, and managed to catch a glimpse of where the mer-people lived. Hermione said they were starting to run out of time, so they swam back to the shore. They stayed just below the surface and waited for their gills to disappear as they snogged without needing air. As they were leaving, they noticed Krum diving into the lake.

January turned into February, and soon it was Valentine's Day, which happened to fall on a Friday. Hermione walked down the stairs to find that many couples were sitting together on the furniture showing their affection. She also found that Harry wasn't there. She decided to wait for Harry before going to breakfast. Before she'd waited two minutes, a model helicopter with a card clamped under it flew straight to Hermione. It hovered in front of her head until she took the hint and pulled it out. It was an index card that simply said,

'HJP requests that HJG follows the helicopter.

P.S. Happy Valentine's Day.'

Smiling brightly, she grabbed her book bag and did just that as the helicopter flew toward the exit. If students were watching Hermione following the helicopter through the halls, she didn't notice as she kept following it happily, until she wound up in front of a picture of fruit. As she looked at the picture, it opened and the helicopter flew inside. She was surprised to see no house elves and a table set for two. She also didn't see Harry.

"Happy Valentine's Day!" came Harry's voice from behind, startling her. She turned quickly and saw Harry taking off his invisibility cloak with one hand and holding a remote control with the other. I borrowed the helicopter from Fred and George, and I've been following you all through the castle. I hope you don't mind."

She walked up to her boyfriend and kissed him thoroughly. When they separated, she said, "I don't mind, but I'm surprised I didn't hear your footsteps."

He grinned. "I did a silencing charm on my boots. I think it would be a good idea if we all did that. Anyway, I thought we could have a private breakfast here." He then pulled out one of the chairs for her and she sat down. The moment he sat down, two plates filled with each of their favorite breakfast foods appeared along with silverware and glasses of pumpkin juice.

"Thank you for this, Harry. Where are the house elves?"

"In the next room. They told me I could use this room until our first class. I just wanted privacy to try to tell you how much you mean to me. I want you to know that I really do love you, Hermione. It's not just a phrase I use to get you to snog me." Hermione chuckled at that. "I noticed that our initials almost match, and hope that maybe one day they will." Harry blushed nervously. "But until then, I want you to know that I don't think I could make it through the day without you."

"Well, Harry. I'm thankful that you feel that way, because I know that I couldn't make it through the day without you." She took his hand in

hers. "I love you more than I could ever say. I-I didn't really think you would ever...ever love me. You were this great celebrity, as well as the most caring and brave people I've ever met. And I was just the buck-toothed, bushy-haired know-it-all who..."

"I never thought of you like that!" said Harry earnestly, "Never! Not even when I didn't fancy you! Not even when we weren't friends!" Harry grinned. "I thought you were a bit annoying, but I always knew you were a nice person. The first time I met you, you were helping Neville find Trevor, and you'd never met him before. You ought to get a picture of that. You were always trying to help when you corrected people in their classes."

"If I get a picture of the first time we met, I'll have to get a picture of when you fought that troll for me."

"No thanks! I'd rather not remember where my wand ended up," Harry said, chuckling.

"Well," said Hermione, "As much as I hate to end this date, I think we'd better go now if we're gonna get to class on time."

"All right," said Harry, getting up, "but we're having dinner in the Room of Requirement."

The rest of the day went by quickly, and they enjoyed their dinner date. They exchanged gifts at dinner. Harry gave her a Valentine's Day card that softly played her favorite love song when she opened it, along with a blue-green muggle teddy-bear that was wearing glasses and holding a book. She gave Harry a dvd of the movie 'Jaws' to play on his laptop, with a note to be careful in the second task.

## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 40 – Rescuing Hermione

Harry woke up early on the morning of the second task. He'd had a nightmare about Jaws. He wished he'd waited to watch that movie until after the second task was over. Hermione had been called away from him the night before while they were watching the movie together in the common room on his computer, and she hadn't returned by the time he went to bed. He got dressed and walked downstairs into the common room. He looked around for Hermione and noticed Ginny looking at him with an expression he couldn't identify on her face. She walked up to him, looking uneasy.

"Er, Harry. Can I talk to you alone?"

He regarded his friend with a puzzled expression. "Well, I guess so."

Without a word, she grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the common room and into the nearest classroom. She then turned to face him, her face red with embarrassment. "Er, well, I know it's none of my business, and I wouldn't have said anything, um, but Parvati and Lavender both noticed that Hermione didn't come to her bed last night."

Harry looked worried. "What?"

Ginny looked at the floor and continued. "I know you and Hermione are in love, and I'm sure Hermione took the, um, precautions, but you can't just...I mean you'll get in trouble, maybe even expelled if McGonagall finds out you're, well, spending your nights together." She said that very fast with a look that clearly said she was uncomfortable. "I mean maybe, with the task today you wanted, er, to relieve stress, but..."

"Ginny," said Harry with a concerned tone of voice, "are you saying that Hermione didn't come back to your dorm at all last night?"

Ginny looked back up at Harry, and appeared to be angry. "No. Did you expect her to just leave when you were done with her?"

Harry shook his head. "You misunderstood. Hermione did not spend the night with me. While we were in the common room, McGonagall asked Hermione to leave with her. She hadn't come back before I went to bed. We did not spend last night shagging."

Ginny paled. "Oh my...I'm sorry...it's just when she didn't come...Lavender said she last saw Hermione with you and we sort of..."

"Assumed," said Harry coldly. "So then she's missing? I've got to find her. Er, bye."

"I...I'm sorry I..."

"You were just trying to help, Ginny. I'm not mad at you, and I won't tell Hermione."

Ginny muttered, "Thanks," as he ran out of the room and back to Gryffindor Tower, leaving her behind.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," Harry said as he activated his map. He looked everywhere he thought she could be, the dorms, the girls' bathrooms, the library, etc., but still couldn't find her. He wasn't sure if the map showed the Room of Requirement or not, so he rushed down the stairs to check that room. When the portrait hole opened, he was surprised to see Lupin there, standing with Ginny, who slid past Harry with a relieved look on her face.

"Harry," said Lupin, "Ginny told me that Hermione's missing."

"Yes," said Harry hurriedly, "Can you help me find her? I was about to check..."

"That won't be necessary," said Remus. "This morning Professor McGonagall told Padfoot and me that Hermione is taking part in the second task."

He stopped dead, his face turning red with fury. "We've taken what you'll sorely miss," he quoted. "They're right I'll sorely miss Hermione

but I swear to God that if she gets hurt I'll tear Dumbledore limb from limb for putting her at risk! Then the school will sorely miss its headmaster!"

"Calm down, cub. Dumbledore isn't going to let anything happen to her or any other hostages in this task. McGonagall got his word on that before she collected Hermione."

Harry took a deep, calming breath. "All right. I guess I panicked. I know he won't let them die just because their champion didn't get to them in time."

"Good. Do you have your gillyweed with you? You've barely got enough time for a light breakfast before you have to go down to the lake."

"Oh, yeah," he said, reaching in his pocket. He'd taken it with him when he originally came down the stairs, before he knew Hermione was missing. He was wearing a red sleeveless T-Shirt along with a pair of black trunks under a school robe. He had a wand-holster on his leg with one of Snape's wands in it. He didn't use wands anymore (except in class) and he didn't want to risk losing his own in the lake. He'd thought about wearing his basilisk armor, but really didn't want anyone to know about it. He did however, put his best shield charm on himself and maintain it all morning.

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They went down to breakfast, where Harry forced a slice of toast, along with a glass of pumpkin juice, down his throat. He was nervous about Hermione's safety. He was glad that he'd practiced already, and figured if he hadn't, he'd have been even more nervous. A lot of people wished him good luck, including Susan Bones of Hufflepuff.

When Susan came up, Harry asked, "So how are things going between you and Ron?" causing her to blush.

"Well, I've been meaning to thank you for that. I can't believe I was so shallow to not want to dance with him because of those awful robes." She chuckled. "He was so nice to me when I asked him to dance, and he's so funny. He has his own type of charm that..."

"I get the picture," said Harry, not wanting to hear how wonderful Ron was. He smiled and said, "I'm happy for you both."

"Thanks. Good luck," she said, and kissed him on the cheek before leaving to find Ron.

"Should Hermione be worried?" came Cho's voice from behind.

"About Susan?" asked Harry after he turned to see Cho Chang and Cedric Diggory, "No, she has her own reasons to worry."

Cho took on a concerned expression. "Why? What's wrong?"

"This stupid task!" said Harry. "We've each got to rescue a hostage from the merpeople in the Black Lake, and mine is Hermione. McGonagall took her last night, and I've got to find her!"

"That's horrible!" exclaimed Cho.

"And ridiculous!" added Cedric. "I'm glad I wasn't chosen. I wouldn't fancy trying to find Cho at the bottom of the lake."

"I know! Why can't they just have us rescue another golden egg? Anyway, I've practiced and prepared as best I could, so I just have to wait until the task begins. Bye the way Cho, I never did thank you properly for standing up for me when Fleur tried to ruin my reputation."

"Oh, it was nothing Harry. I just know how much you care about Hermione, and would hate for a lie like that to come between you."

Harry smiled at her. "You really are a wonderful person. Cedric's lucky to have you."

"I agree," said Cedric.

She blushed and said, "Thanks," and walked off with her boyfriend.

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The whistle echoed shrilly through the cold, still air, as Harry dived into the lake, his mouth full of gillyweed. He felt the icy lake warm up

as he grew gills, and started swimming as fast as he could in the direction of the mer-village he'd found with Hermione, carefully avoiding the grindylows.

It was about twenty minutes after he entered the water that he saw Hermione, as well as a male Durmstrang student Harry guessed was Krum's best friend and a little girl who appeared to be Fleur's sister apparently in a magically-induced sleep. He swam up to Hermione and saw that she was tied to the tail of a stone merperson. He looked around him and saw that the merpeople weren't interfering, so he pulled out his wand for show, and then magically loosened the robe binding his beloved. He put an arm around her and turned when he saw the scariest thing he'd ever seen in his life.

A shark was swimming straight at him, and hit him while he was momentarily frozen in fear. He soon realized that he hadn't been eaten, and that the shark was really a half-transfigured Viktor Krum. He then realized with rage that Krum had purposely hit him, so he wandlessly enlarged Krum's trunks, causing them to fall down to the bottom of the lake while Viktor was figuring out how he'd loose his best friend without biting his hands off. The last thing Harry saw as he took off toward the surface with Hermione was Krum swimming hurriedly downward. Harry laughed as he continued upward.

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At the half-hour mark, everyone was surprised to see Hermione surface near the shore. She opened her eyes and saw the crowd applauding. She felt Harry holding her, but saw that he was still below the surface. She then realized that he must have more time before the gillyweed wore off. She swam ashore and was immediately met by Dumbledore, Ginny, and Neville. Madam Pomfrey rushed up and threw a towel around her. Hermione said, "Harry's using gillyweed, so he can't come up yet. How long has he been under?"

"Gillyweed?" repeated Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes. "That's a great idea. He's now been under water for thirty-five minutes. I believe that leaves him twenty-five more. Don't worry about his score. It's based off of when you came out of the water, not him." She saw Karkaroff and Maxime looking very unhappy.

About five minutes after Hermione came to the surface, Fleur was brought up by a rescue team. It was announced that she couldn't get past the grindylows. Right after that, Krum's friend surfaced, missing several fingers and bleeding. Once his eyes opened, he started screaming in pain. Krum surfaced as the girlish screams began. He was holding his oversized trunks up with one hand while yelling in Russian at his friend, who made a fist, but then looked at his hands and yelled something Harry, who was nearby in the lake, believed to be an extremely vile Russian profanity. The student put down his hands and got out of the water. Madam Pomfrey immediately went to him. While she was still tending him, Harry resurfaced (to be greeted enthusiastically by Hermione), followed by the merpeople carrying Fleur's little sister.

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The scores were as follows: Harry got the full fifty points and Fleur got twenty-five. Krum had earned the fifty for getting back on time, but lost five points for every damaged finger on his hostage, so he ended up with twenty points. Both Krum and Karkaroff argued about it, but the other judges were adamant that Krum shouldn't have injured his hostage by using his shark teeth to free him. If he didn't have a knife or wand with him, he could've found a sharp stone at the bottom of the lake.

All of the champions and hostages were interviewed by Potter Press reporter Anna Jesse for what was sure to be a thorough description of the event, not the love-lives of the participants. After Hermione thoroughly rewarded Harry in a broom closet, they found a party – not in Gryffindor Tower, but in the Great Hall. There were not only Gryffindors, but Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs. Even some Slytherins were there who congratulated the hero of the Black Lake. Harry had earned an incredible head start in the final task!

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 41 – Finding a Horcrux

The door to the Room of Requirement opened, and both the potions and defense teacher walked in. It was a Saturday morning, a week after the second task. They chuckled when they saw that the room had the same swimming pool it had contained when Harry had learned the clue to the egg. They walked to the edge of the pool and were slightly surprised by what they saw in the water.

Instead of just seeing Harry and Hermione snogging, enjoying the affects of gillyweed, they saw Neville and Ginny in another part of the pool doing the same thing. “I really ought to get Professor Brooks to come here,” said Sirius with a grin.

“As long as Tonks comes too,” said Remus. Recently they had admitted their feelings and were now a couple.

A few comfortable chairs appeared for the men as Sirius said, “Might as well be comfortable while we wait.”

About fifteen minutes later, the teenagers started emerging from the pool one by one as the gillyweed wore off. Neville was the first one out of the water. He looked at the teachers and paled. “Er, um, are you gonna take house points for this ‘cause I’m, er, sor...”

“We ought to give you house points for finding this creative way to snog,” said Sirius with a chuckle.

Neville blushed as Ginny came out of the pool. “Hello professors.”

“Hi Ginny,” said Lupin.

Harry and Hermione were soon to follow, and then they went to their respective changing rooms where they made sure to put on their armor as well as regular clothes. When they were fully dressed, the pool disappeared and was replaced by a few couches. The couples sat in them and faced the professors. “So, what’s up guys?” said Harry.

Sirius leaned closer toward them looking excited. "Professor Dumbledore has found a location that he believes contains a Horcrux, and he's agreed to let Harry and Hermione come with us."

The mentioned teenagers looked excited while the other two looked slightly disappointed. Moony saw those expressions and said, "Ginny, Neville; it was hard to convince him to let those two come with us when he knows that they're more powerful than any of us. He's never seen you two dueling, and he knows how both Mrs. Weasley and Mrs. Longbottom would react to you going Horcrux hunting."

"What about Hermione's parents?" asked Ginny.

"They trust Harry and me," said Hermione.

A few minutes later, Professors Dumbledore, Lupin, Black, and Brooks were in the headmaster's office with Harry and Hermione. They were all seated on conjured chairs and wearing muggle clothing as Dumbledore explained the situation.

"As you already know, I believe that I've discovered the location of another Horcrux. It is the remains of the orphanage where Voldemort was raised."

"You found it?" asked Professor Brooks, appearing to be astonished.  
"I couldn't."

"I had the advantage of having visited the orphanage myself when I personally delivered Tom Riddle's Hogwarts letter. Although I must admit, it was hardly recognizable. I didn't get the chance to visit the location until after the second task, but when I did visit it, I detected magical protection."

"Which led you to believe Voldemort is hiding something there," said Sirius.

"Yes," said Dumbledore. "I also believe that Mr. Potter and Miss Granger have earned the right to accompany us. Truthfully, I wouldn't want to duel either of you two."

Hermione blushed while Harry's ears went pink. "Thank you sir," Harry said, "but I am curious why you don't feel that Ginny and Neville are able to accompany us. I know they can't do wandless magic, but neither can most of you."

"They helped us fight the people that attacked during the Yule Ball," added Hermione.

The headmaster looked thoughtful for a moment. "I would like to personally evaluate them before asking them to join us, but I don't have time today. I shall evaluate them at the earliest convenience and consider inviting them to our next adventure. But for today, they'll stay at the castle. I've made a portkey that will leave in five minutes. Are there any questions?"

"I have one, sir," said Hermione, "Won't Harry and I get in trouble for using underage magic?"

With a twinkle in his eye, Dumbledore answered, "No. You see, if they detect magic around us, the ministry will assume it's being performed by an adult. You see, they can only detect magic, not who's performing it."

"That's why I got blamed for Dobby doing magic in the Dursley's house," said Harry.

"But sir," said Hermione, "does that mean that they only give warnings to children living in muggle homes?"

The twinkle left the aged professor's eyes. "Well, yes. According to ministry records, no pureblood witch or wizard has ever performed underage magic."

"In other words, it's another prejudiced law meant to give the ministry an excuse to stop muggleborns from attending Hogwarts."

"Exactly," said Sirius.

"The Potter Press will definitely have to write an article about that," said Harry with a smirk. Hermione, remind me to call Mrs. Weasley when we get back."

“Definitely,” said Hermione.

“Well,” said Dumbledore with an amused expression, “If there are no more questions I’d suggest we all grab hold of the portkey,” and indicated a muggle tie that had pictures of Mickey Mouse on it.

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The group arrived in an alley with Harry, Hermione, and Professor Brooks falling on the ground while the others landed properly on their feet.

“What? Help!” shouted an apparently homeless muggle about five feet from them as he started to run for his life.

Harry knew he couldn’t be allowed to escape, so he put up an invisible barrier surrounding the muggle while Dumbledore stepped forward toward the man who was cowering in fear. The headmaster pulled out his wand and said, “Obliviate.”

The group quickly left the alley and followed Dumbledore to their nearby destination. It was a filthy abandoned building that looked like it should be condemned. Brooks commented, “I’ll bet dear-old-dad put a charm on the building to make sure muggles wouldn’t want to condemn this...place.”

“Indubitably,” said Dumbledore, “otherwise it would have been destroyed decades ago and replaced with another building.”

“Moldyshorts has gone to some trouble to make sure the place is still standing,” said Sirius.

“We’ve got to be very careful,” said Lupin.

“I’ll go in first,” said Brooks.

They all had their wands out as they entered the building through the doorway that had a door hanging on by one hinge. Behind Professor Brooks were Dumbledore, Harry, Hermione, Sirius, and Remus in that order (the kids in the middle). The place was completely full of dust.

Dumbledore pulled out his wand and muttered some Latin phrases before saying, "As I suspected, let's go that way." He pointed in the direction of Tom's old room. They walked into the room with no problem and looked around. There were some dusty old beds in the room, along with a few dressers and a trunk. Harry noticed something and walked up to the trunk.

He looked at the rusted carving of a snake and started hissing at it as the others watched. Brooks whispered to everybody, "He's telling the trunk to open," just before they heard its creaking locks release. "Don't touch it!" Brooks shouted as Harry reached for the handle. He pulled back his hand as she walked up to the trunk and opened it, shaking slightly as though she'd felt a chill. "It was making sure I'm related to Slytherin," she explained. "It would've probably paralyzed you," she said to Harry. There was only one thing in the trunk, and it was standing in the center. Dumbledore exclaimed, "Hufflepuff's cup," and Brooks took it out of the trunk. That's when it happened.

It felt as though an earthquake were happening. Brooks shouted, "I must have needed to do some kind of spell before removing it! Let's get out of here!"

They escaped the room while pieces of the ceiling began to fall around them, but it soon became clear that they would not be able to make it out alive. The whole ceiling collapsed above them. Harry saw this happening and without a word protected them all from the impact (causing everything to fall around them, bouncing off their bodies as though they were walls), but they were soon discovering that they were running out of air in the middle of the debris. All they could breathe was the dust that was now floating all around them. Hermione realized what to do before it was too late. In one moment she put them all under the bubblehead charm, giving them air to breathe. They managed to slowly make their way out of the wrecked building.

Albus spoke once they were clear of the wreckage. "I would create a portkey to go directly to Hogwarts, but I believe that after that, we all deserve a drink at the Three Broomsticks, my treat." He looked at Harry and Hermione, "Butterbeers for you two, naturally." They nodded. "Tell me, have you two mastered apparition yet?"

Adrianna Brooks answered, “I’ve taught them everything I could, and they’ve been able to pop all around the Room of Requirement. It might not be a bad idea to try them out from a greater distance. In this group, the ministry shouldn’t be able to detect whether they side-alonged or not.”

“I believe you are correct,” said Albus. “We’ll apparate behind the building where no one should see us, just in case. Are you ready, Mr. Potter and Miss Granger?”

Both teens excitedly said, “Yes!”

With several small pops, the group arrived right behind the Three Broomsticks. “Everyone alright?” said Lupin. “No splinching?” All the adults looked carefully at the very happy teenagers who were nodding.

“Splendid,” said Dumbledore.

“Well done,” said Sirius, slapping Harry on the back.

“I knew you could do it,” said Adrianna.

“If I might,” said Albus, “I suggest we make our way into the Three Broomsticks so we can give Madam Rosmerta our orders. I’m rather thirsty. Congratulations again on your first successful long-distance apparition. Just remember you didn’t learn it from a Hogwarts professor.” The group chuckled and went into the pub.

After they’d gotten their drinks, Moony looked at the teenagers. “That was some incredible spellwork you did. Harry, how did you make us all solid enough to not be affected by the roof falling on us? And Hermione, I’ve never seen anyone perform more than one Bubblehead charm at a time, and you produced six.”

Harry answered first, “I just knew what needed to be done and it happened. That’s the way my wandless magic works. Sometimes if I want to do something complex and there’s a spell that already does it, like charming muggle devices, it’s easier to do it with a wand, but

simple ideas like, 'Shield us so we're not affected by the roof falling on us,' come easy."

"I agree with Harry. That's exactly how it is with me," added Hermione.

"Have you ever considered inventing spells?" asked Dumbledore.

"What?" asked both Harry and Hermione together as the teachers stared at them.

"Although many spells, such as Lily Potter's, originated as a combination of several spells that already existed, our base spells originated as wandless actions, and then the witch or wizard performed a ritual which made them into a worded spell that uses a wand. Surely you're aware that many of the things you do without a wand are actions that have been turned into spells."

"Of course, sir," said Hermione, "I guess we just never thought of it."

"If you'd like, I can try to locate a book on that, although for the most part, base spell creation is handled by the Department of Mysteries at the ministry. It's not illegal to invent spells independently, although some people frown on it as though the Ministry is some sort of divine institution that must always be in charge of all magic. The truth is that the ministry's only functions should be to keep the peace in the wizarding world and to make sure the muggles don't know about us. Beyond that they are overstepping their boundaries."

"Like when they say how thick a cauldron bottom should be," added Harry with a smirk.

"Exactly," said Dumbledore, chuckling. "They shouldn't interfere in any situation as long as no one's rights are being violated and muggles aren't involved."

"The laws should be very simple," said Hermione. "They should specify everyone's rights, such as the rights to life and property, and state that no magic in any form, whether originating from a person or a charmed object, should be performed in front of muggles, with the exception of those directly related to a magical person, such as my parents. Then it should suggest punishments."

“Exactly,” said Dumbledore, “Then our constitution could be just a few simple paragraphs, and life would be simpler. For example, why should it be illegal for me to create a portkey as long as I’m not doing it to break into somebody’s house so I can rob or kill them?”

“One thing that should be in there is that no one should be put in Azkaban until they have had a trial,” said Sirius coldly.

“Naturally,” said Dumbledore. “You see, in their efforts to regulate everything, they’ve forgotten to protect peoples’ basic rights. Hagrid has yet to receive an apology for his unjust imprisonment in Azkaban two years ago. The only reason he was arrested is because he’d been expelled fifty years before because Voldemort framed him for the crime at that time. And as we know, he’s not the only one who’s been thrown into Azkaban without a trial. They should have some other place for untried people to stay where they’re not subjected to Dementors.”

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The conversation continued, and eventually they all walked back to Hogwarts, where Dumbledore destroyed Hufflepuff’s cup in front of them. Harry noticed that when it was destroyed, it glowed green and seemed to scream. While the scream was still sounding, Harry’s head, specifically his scar, seemed to feel heavy. Not exactly painful, but uncomfortable.

When Harry tried explaining what he was feeling, Dumbledore’s expression grew very grim. The aged man said, “I had hoped I was wrong, but it appears that your scar is a Horcrux, and now that there are only it and one more remaining, you are beginning to feel the weight of keeping Voldemort alive.”

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## **More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 42 – Experimental Magic**

Suddenly everyone was staring at Harry, whose face had turned white. Hermione, with a horrified expression on her face, took Harry's hand, knowing that if he ever needed her support, it was now.

"Wh-What?" asked Harry, hoping he had misunderstood.

The gazes all shifted back toward Dumbledore, who said with a sad expression, "You heard me correctly Harry. Your scar is a Horcrux." The old man looked on the verge of tears. "I'm afraid that you'll have to die before Tom can."

"Wait a minute!" shouted several people angrily.

Dumbledore put up his hands. "I wasn't proposing we kill him now. We'd be as bad as Voldemort. I'm just saying that while Harry lives, Voldemort can't fully die. We can try to delay his return to power, as Harry did with the Philosopher's Stone and the diary. I suggest we concentrate our efforts on the remaining unidentified Horcrux."

Sirius had to speak up. "Isn't there some way to destroy the Horcrux without hurting Harry?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "When a Horcrux is inside a living thing, be it plant, animal, or human, it survives off of the host's life force. As long as that life force exists, so will the Horcrux."

Harry took on an angrier expression than he'd ever had before. "That bloody son of a..."

"Harry," said Hermione desperately. "Calm down. We'll find a solution." She then turned back to Dumbledore with a light of hope in her eyes. "Headmaster, is there a way to...transfer the Horcrux to something else?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Granger. No spell exists to transfer a Horcrux."

"Then, maybe I can do it wandlessly, without a spell."

“To attempt to transfer the Horcrux from Harry without damaging him would be far too complex to do without a spell. There are too many factors to consider, the most important part would be Harry’s mind.”

“His mind, sir?”

“Yes, his mental health. He has hosted, however unwillingly, a piece of Voldemort’s soul inside him. It has been a part of him almost his entire life. It is a part of him, infused in his magic and mind.”

“You mean I get my powers from Voldemort?” asked Harry, still angry judging from how red his face was.

“Some of your powers, such as Parseltongue, but I don’t believe all. Your parents were both powerful, so naturally you’d be powerful in your own right. However, some of your power may come from the Horcrux. However, it’s just as likely that the Horcrux is holding back some of your own power.”

“Holding back?” asked Harry, clearly not fully understanding.

Hermione explained, “Binding your magic. Harry, don’t you remember what Professor Vector said in class a few weeks ago about magical potential?”

He blushed at momentarily forgetting his arithmancy that he’d worked on so hard to learn so he could drop divination. “Oh yeah. If something is binding magic, the victim’s potential is limited, so some of their spells will have less affect while others won’t work at all. There are spells and cursed objects that can do that.”

Lupin said with a smirk, “It’s theoretically possible that if you lost the Horcrux you could lose some power and gain the same amount back.”

“And come out even,” said Harry unemotionally.

“But I’m afraid that all of that is pointless speculation,” said Dumbledore firmly. He looked into Harry’s eyes and said, “I’m very sorry Harry, but as long as you live, Voldemort can’t die.”

“But that’s not what the prophecy says, sir,” Hermione stated. “It says ‘neither can live while the other survives,’ not ‘the dark lord can’t die while the other survives.’”

That put a spark of hope in Harry, which Albus shot down immediately by saying, “Prophecies can come true in many ways that we can’t predict.”

Hermione looked upset, but instead of yelling or arguing, she simply said, “If you’ll excuse us, I think Harry and I need some time alone to talk about this.”

“That’s fine,” said Dumbledore in his grandfatherly voice. “It is a lot to take in.”

“By the way,” said Hermione as they reached the door, “Don’t forget to try to find that book for me.”

“Of course, Miss Granger. Good day.”

A few minutes later, Hermione had practically dragged Harry to the Room of Requirement. “I don’t want to talk about it!” he said once they were inside. He hadn’t wanted to contradict his girlfriend in front of everyone, nor had he wanted to accidentally let the whole school know about the Horcrux in his head by arguing with her in the halls.

“But you need to talk about it!” she said firmly. “I can’t imagine how I’d feel if I were you right now! I won’t say I understand, but I will say that I love you and want to help!”

Harry had been ready to argue that she didn’t understand, but she’d already covered that argument. He sighed as a couch appeared behind him, and sat down on the far right. He didn’t say one word, instead looked in her eyes as she sat as close to him as possible without being on his lap.

After she felt she’d given him enough time to speak, she said, “Can you try to tell me what you’re feeling?”

He took a deep breath and gave her a small grin. “I suppose the only way I could get out of this conversation is by running away.”

She grinned back at him. “You’ll never go where I can’t find you.”

“I suppose not.” He sighed. “I don’t know what I feel. Violated, used, dirty, angry...scared. I guess they’d all apply. Does this mean Voldemort can possess me like the diary possessed Ginny? One day we could be snogging and all the sudden Voldemort will take me over and I’ll kill you because of his stupid prejudices. That monster used my body to keep his Horcrux! But how could he! I would think my murder is what he’d use to split his soul, not use my body to house the fragment!”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “What if that was his plan?”

“Wh-what do you mean?”

“What if he’d done whatever ritual was needed to make a Horcrux prior to the murder before he came up the stairs. He shot his death curse at you, but your mum jumped in front of it, becoming the source for his soul split. At that moment, he knew he’d have to make another Horcrux quickly, and so he chose to hide his Horcrux in you. At that moment, he may have planned to kidnap you and raise you as his servant. Only when he put the Horcrux in you after your mum died to save you, something went wrong because of the protection and he was vanquished.” She gasped. “Maybe you didn’t survive the avada kadavra curse like everyone believes! You and Voldemort are the only people alive who were there, you don’t remember, and Voldemort isn’t giving interviews.”

“He marked me instead of trying to kill me!”

“As his equal...with a part of him inside you.”

“But the last line doesn’t make sense! He can’t die while I’m alive!”

She smiled at him. “Not unless the Horcrux becomes irrelevant. If we can remove it.”

“You heard Dumbledore!” he said, getting frustrated again. “No spell can do it, and it’s too complicated to do it without a spell.”

“Like a computer program,” Hermione said. Harry looked at her like she’d grown a second head. “It’s possible to tell a computer every little thing you want it to do one command at a time in what’s known as machine language. That’s similar to our working magic without wands. However, it’s a lot easier to use programs, which are basically a set of commands. That’s like a spell – a series of individual magic commands put together in one program. A wand acts like an operating system like Windows or Linux.”

Harry was just staring at her, almost completely confused.

“Never mind. I was just comparing magic to a muggle programming book I read last summer. My point is that if we can figure out everything that needs to happen to remove the Horcrux from you, and we get that book from Professor Dumbledore, we might be able to create a spell to do that.”

“So all we have to do is make a bunch of Horcruxes out of guinea pigs and keep trying to move them until we get it right?” he said sarcastically.

She glared at him for a moment, and then smiled wickedly. “Sure. Let’s kill Snape for the first one.”

He chuckled. “Sounds like a plan to me.”

“Seriously though, I think we should find out everything we possibly can about Horcruxes and their affect on living things. Maybe how to detect souls. If there is such a test, you should register as having more than one soul.”

“More like one and a half.”

Hermione smiled. “Exactly. Detecting souls would probably be the first step in the spell. I wonder if I could do that now.”

Harry took a deep breath as he paled. “You can try,” he said a bit unsteadily.

Hermione got up and stood in front of Harry. She closed her eyes for a moment to focus herself. Then she looked at Harry, concentrating on seeing his souls. She could now see through his skull as though she were giving him a magical x-ray. Harry didn't feel affected at all as a small bright white ball of light appeared inside his transparent (to Hermione) head between his nose and mouth. Hermione thought to herself that 'The soul is close to the mouth. No wonder Dementors suck the soul out through there.' She also saw a much smaller, sickly yellow ball of light inside Harry's forehead, right behind his scar. Her stray thought of removing it right then caused it to glow brighter as Harry winced in pain and reached for his scar. She immediately stopped.

"Ouch!" Harry screamed as he rubbed his scar. "Be careful!"

"I'm sorry," she said as she sat on his lap and began to rub his forehead. "I got overzealous after I saw the Horcrux and tried to remove it. I promise I'll be more careful, even if I have to do a few more experiments."

"Yes Dr. Frankenstein, I do your bidding," said Harry bowing in a bad imitation of a servant in an old horror movie.

She slapped his arm. "I am not Dr. Frankenstein, you prat."

"No, you're Mine."

"Harry, I just remembered! We need to call Mrs. Weasley about the underage magic law!"

"I don't feel like going back to Dumbledore's office. Let's write a letter and send it with Hedwig."

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A few days later, the Potter Press ran an article about it.

*"Underage Magic Law Proven to be Prejudiced"*

*By Anna Jesse*

*The law called the 'Reasonable Restriction of Underage Magic' has resulted in hundreds of Hogwarts students receiving warnings about it – five actually expelled. It is interesting to note that every single case has been a muggle-raised student – all but one of them was muggleborn. That exception was of course Harry Potter, who used to live with his Aunt and Uncle. Some may say that this means that muggleborn children are out of control and can't stop themselves from using magic. The fact of the matter is that this is not the case.*

*The ministry simply cannot track who performs magic, only where it is performed. This means that any child who lives in a wizarding home may or may not be practicing magic outside of school, but will never get in trouble with the Ministry if they do. This not only gives muggleborn children a distinct disadvantage academically over pureblood and half blood students that are aware of this (some may simply experiment one time and find out they weren't caught, and therefore get in the habit) because they can't practice during the holiday, but it also persecutes them unfairly.*

*All that it would take is for a muggleborn child to perform magic, which becomes second-nature during the school year, twice, and they'd be expelled. They are never allowed to show their parents what they've learned in school, which leads to their parents not really understanding what or even if their kids are learning at Hogwarts. The 'Hogwarts' Happenings' article in this paper contains interviews with several muggleborn students about misunderstandings they've had at home because of this law. Some muggleborn students have even been pulled out of Hogwarts because their parents can't understand the point of learning magic if you can't use it at home. We at the Potter Press suggest that this law should be modified to allow magic to be performed in the home as long as it's only not in front of anyone who's not aware of magic. Of course, that particular offense would be covered by the statute of secrecy anyway, so there would be no point in the law at all... ”*

The article was distributed to nearly every student at Hogwarts at breakfast, who read it with much interest. Many of the students seemed both upset and happy about this information, as the conversations got louder and louder until finally, the headmaster felt he had to do something. He put down his fork, wiped his mouth, and

walked up to the podium. “SILENCE!” he shouted, causing the whole hall to quiet down. “I gather that the cat is now out of the bag. I can assure you that the reason we announce the underage restriction every year is because the ministry tells us to. Many laws have been written by bigots who are against muggleborn witches and wizards. I have a feeling that this particular law will be modified soon. What I want to do is stress to you that even if you end up with fewer restrictions on your use of magic, you must exercise common sense and not hurt yourselves by performing dangerous spells. In the meantime however, I must insist that you keep the noise level down to a low roar.

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A few days after the article came out, Hermione, Harry, Neville, Ginny, Sirius, and Remus were dueling in the Room of Requirement when Dumbledore walked in carrying an old book. This round was everybody but Hermione, who was researching on her computer, against Harry. The room hid Dumbledore as he observed for several minutes as Harry fought, avoiding spell after spell until finally a stunner from Neville’s wand got him when he was caught between all four wands.

“Bravo, bravo!” said the headmaster. “Well done Harry for avoiding getting hit for so long, and well done Neville for finally stunning him. I must say Mr. Longbottom, that you and Miss Weasley are as good of duelists as most of the professors here.”

They both blushed at the compliments. “Thank you, sir,” said Ginny.

“You’re most welcome, Miss Weasley. The reason I’m here is to loan this book to Miss Granger.”

Hermione, who’d been studying from her laptop, looked up and smiled widely upon seeing the tome in the headmaster’s hand. She got up and walked up to him. “Thank you very much, headmaster. Let me copy it onto my computer.”

She took the book and performed the spell to scan it. “I’ve been wanting to speak with you sir,” she said nervously.

“Oh,” he said happily.

“I want to create a spell for transferring Horcruxes and wanted you to tell me everything you believe would need to be done.”

The aged professor sighed heavily. “I already told you that I don’t think anything can be done for Harry. I...”

“Harry! What about Harry?” said Ginny, who’d been standing nearby.

Dumbledore’s face turned red. “My apologies, Miss Granger. I’d assumed you’d informed them.”

“Well,” said Hermione as Harry walked toward them. “Harry’s been sort of reluctant. He’s afraid Ginny and Neville will be afraid of him and not want anything to do with us anymore.”

“Why would I be afraid of Harry?” asked Ginny, “unless the...you wanted to transfer a Horcrux...why would you...unless.” She turned to face Harry with a look of sympathy in her eyes as she looked at his scar. “D-Did Tom put a Horcrux i-in you?”

He hung his head in shame. “Yes,” he mumbled.

Ginny walked up to him and hugged him with tears flowing from her eyes. “How can you think that of us? I’m the last person to judge you about that!” He returned the hug, and after a few moments, she let go of Harry and faced Albus. “Hermione is trying to find a way to help Harry and you won’t help her?”

“I’m afraid I don’t want to give Harry false hope. I...”

**“SO INSTEAD YOU WANT HIM TO HAVE NO HOPE AT ALL!”**

“He may be seriously hurt or even die if Miss Granger attempts to...”

“I will die before Voldemort can if I don’t do anything! If I’m the only one who can kill Voldemort, and he can’t die while I’m alive, he’s guaranteed to win! According to the prophecy, I have a fighting chance! There has to be a way to eliminate this Horcrux without killing me!”

"But dying while removing the Horcrux could count as dying by his hand!" argued Dumbledore.

"I want my godson to try this," said Sirius, joining in the conversation, "and I'd appreciate it if you help Hermione in any way you can, thus increasing the odds of her success. But with or without your help, we are going to do this!"

Albus saw the determined look on Harry's guardian, and sighed. "Very well, I'll tell you everything I know about Horcruxes."

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In between classes, Hermione worked relentlessly on first reading and rereading that book, and then on creating the spell. She barely even noticed the article from the Potter Press that said the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Magic had been revised to make it illegal for a minor to perform magic outside of their home or in the presence of muggles unaware of the existence of magic. Now muggleborns can demonstrate magic for their parents, and practice all they need to over the holidays (not to mention do their chores magically). A house rule the reporter suggested is not to perform magic in the house if there's a visitor there.

After a month of Harry hardly being able to snog his girlfriend, where more often than not, when he was alone with her, she'd perform experiments regarding his Horcrux (that she'd stop the moment it got painful), Hermione announced she was ready. On a Saturday morning, Dumbledore insisted that they have Madam Pomfrey monitor Harry's life signs during the spell. She'd been told only that they'd discovered a dark curse inside Harry's scar, and that Hermione was attempting to remove it. A nurse from St. Mungo's was running the Hospital Wing while Madam Pomfrey, Harry, Hermione, Ginny, Neville, Dumbledore, Black, Lupin, and Brooks were in the Room of Requirement.

Harry was lying comfortably on a bed, and Madam Pomfrey was standing beside him, not very happy that a student, no matter how bright, was performing the spell. However, Dumbledore had told her to allow it, and to do her best to help Harry afterward.

Hermione performed very complex wand movements while muttering an equally difficult incantation. A few moments after she began, Harry's eyes closed and he looked peaceful for about two minutes. At that point, his eyes opened wide as he screamed. He started shaking and sweating, and his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Hermione continued the spell. After five agonizing minutes, his body relaxed again and his eyes closed. About two minutes after that, his eyes opened and he started screaming. At the same moment, a green vapor started seeping out of his scar and into a Kleenex tissue Hermione had placed beside Harry. His scar began fading as the vapor left his body. When it was over, the scar was barely visible upon close inspection.

Madam Pomfrey ran a diagnostic spell on Harry, looking for anything that could be wrong with him while Dumbledore took the Horcrux tissue. "Well, he's stunned right now, so an enervate should wake him. It seems his magic is unstable as well. Professor Dumbledore mentioned the possibility that this curse had been affecting Harry's magic." She then revived Harry, who blinked and looked around.

"H-Hermione?" he said when his eyes rested on his girlfriend.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

He gave her a grin. "Light-headed." He put his right hand on his scar. "It feels, different. Does it look different?" Madam Pomfrey conjured a mirror and handed it to her patient. "It's a lot thinner and lighter, less noticeable," he said with a grin.

Madam Pomfrey asked, "Do you have your wand? I'd like you to attempt a spell."

Hermione handed him his wand. "What spell do you want me to perform?"

"We'll start with a simple first-year spell. Levitate this quill." She put a quill on a table.

"Harry confidently pointed his wand at the feather, did the swish and flick with his wand and said, "Wingardium Leviosa." Nothing happened.



## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 43 – Relearning

Harry felt panicked. “Wingardium Leviosa!” he said again, and still nothing happened. Hermione had a look of complete terror on her face. Harry felt like Ron must have in Flitwick’s class on their first Halloween at Hogwarts. “WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!” The quill stayed there.

Madam Pomfrey looked very worried and was wearing an obviously fake smile. “As I said, Mr. Potter, your magic is unstable now, but should c...come back.”

“May I suggest...” said Dumbledore, “...that Harry try another wand?”

“He’s not going to get better results with someone else’s wand than with his own,” said Pomfrey indignantly. “This wand is specifically suited to Harry.”

Harry gave a slight smile as he thought about what was special about his wand. “I’d like to try, Madam Pomfrey.”

She sighed but then handed Harry her wand. “You shouldn’t expect different results with my wand.”

“Wingardium Leviosa!” he said while concentrating as hard as he could, performing the appropriate wand motion. The quill rose a few inches off the ground. Everyone was staring.

“What?” exclaimed Poppy, “Try your wand again.”

After Harry tried his wand unsuccessfully, he tried everybody else’s. He got some sort of result, not nearly as good as he’d hoped, from every wand but his own.

Hermione said, “But how can that be unless the wand bonded with...” and she closed her mouth to avoid telling Madam Pomfrey about the Horcrux.

“With what?”

Dumbledore decided to give her a half truth. "The phoenix feather core of Harry's wand came from the same phoenix as the one in Voldemort's wand." Pomfrey flinched at the name. Harry's jaw dropped. He didn't think anybody besides himself and Ollivander knew that. Everyone else was staring at Harry's wand. "Mr. Ollivander told me about it. You see, the Phoenix that supplied the feathers is Fawkes."

"What?" asked Harry.

"Oh yes, but then we're off topic. We're hypothesizing that the curse in Harry's scar somehow made him feel like Voldemort to the wand, and now that the curse isn't inside Harry, the wand doesn't recognize him at all."

"I...I suppose that's as good an explanation as any," said Pomfrey. "Mr. Potter, aside from your difficulty with magic, and I believe you're still having a difficulty if you can't levitate a feather one foot off the ground, even if it is with someone else's wand. You are perfectly fine so you don't have to stay in the hospital wing. I suggest you get a new wand as soon as possible and see me then. In the mean time, I'll give you medical leave from classes for a week, and hopefully by then you'll be able to keep up with your classes.

"Do not let anybody know that Harry's having difficulty with his magic," said Dumbledore emphatically to the whole group. "As you all know, he's been attacked several times this year and managed to fight off his attackers. This would be their perfect opportunity. We'll simply say that he's ill and contagious. Mr. Potter, I believe you should stay in this room. It should supply everything you need, and very few people know about it. I suggest you say you believe he's at St. Mungo's but you're not sure, if anyone asks." Dumbledore looked at Harry. "Mr. Potter, aside from our secret trip to Mr. Ollivander's, which I personally will escort you on Monday, do not leave this room."

Harry nodded his head. "Yes sir, I don't fancy being caught powerless by Snape myself. I would like my trunk brought down though." His trunk immediately appeared, loaded with all of his stuff.

Dumbledore smiled with a twinkle in his eyes. "I suggest you call one of your house elves to keep you company until you're fully recovered.

One of them should be able to defend you should the need arise." He then turned to Madam Pomfrey. "Thank you very much for your services. Mr. Potter will have a new wand by Monday afternoon. You may test his magic then."

"Very well, I really should get back to my other patients."

Once she was gone, Dumbledore said, "Would you mind attempting wandless magic?"

"Sure," said Harry. Harry looked at the quill, but it didn't immediately rise. His brow furrowed in concentration and the quill finally began to rise. He closed his eyes and it shot up to the ceiling. "Doing magic...I don't know...somehow feels different." He took a deep breath. "An hour ago, I could've sent that quill up and placed it where I wanted with just a thought. Now I have to concentrate just to get it to move at all. If I concentrate too hard, it goes too far. I only wanted to levitate it two feet in the air."

Dumbledore smiled. "Well, it seems you'll have to relearn your control, but you will. I suggest you spend your week off practicing. It seems that you were unconsciously using the Horcrux to help you perform magic, and now you've got to learn how to fully use your own magical core. We'll leave right after breakfast on Monday morning. Now, to dispose of the Horcrux."

"Wait a minute, Headmaster," said Harry.

"Yes."

"Could I borrow that Horcrux for a minute?"

Dumbledore looked amused. He handed the Kleenex to Harry, who proceeded to blow his nose and spit into the tissue, expressing his feelings about his nemesis. He then placed the befooled tissue on a table that appeared. Dumbledore then pointed his wand at the Horcrux and performed a spell that made the tissue burn as faint screaming was heard. Green smoke rose up from the table that now had a burn mark on it. The table then disappeared because it was no longer required.

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After each of them gave him words of encouragement, along with promises to visit, Harry found himself alone with a clearly shaken up Hermione. She hugged him and kissed him gently. When they separated, he noticed she'd been crying. "What's wrong?"

"I...I thought I'd turned you into a squib. I was so scared you'd hate me..."

"Hold on! First, I could never hate you. Second, you freed me from Voldemort, and I think losing my magic would be an equitable trade for that. Thirdly, I lived for eleven years not knowing I was magical, and I could do that again, especially without the Dursleys trying to ruin my life. I guess I wouldn't be able to stay here during the school year, so I hope you wouldn't forget about me..."

"I could never forget about you, Harry! How could you even think that? I love you!" To prove the sincerity of that statement, she proceeded to give him to most passionate snog of their lives thus far.

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The next morning, Harry was in the room alone with Dobby, working on re-mastering levitation. He was getting frustrated as it would either barely move or it would move too much. The more he practiced, the more the latter would happen. Dobby was sitting quietly until Harry exclaimed in frustration, "This is impossible!"

"Dobby is begging Harry Potter sir's forgiveness, but Harry Potter is being wrong. Harry Potter is a great wizard and is doing everything he is wanting."

"But I can't control how much magic I put into the spells, Dobby! I could try to rescue someone and accidentally kill them, or else I won't use enough magic to help at all!"

"Then Harry Potter is practicing concentration. It is seeming that Harry Potter is even more powerful than before."

"No, that's not it. I used to be able to use just as much power, but I could control it. Maybe you're right about my concentration though."

Harry stopped what he was doing and went over in his mind how he'd been practicing his magic. He realized that before the Horcrux was removed, he hardly concentrated at all. It had become second nature to him. Because he started having his difficulty, he had to concentrate hard before he re-found his magical core. He then understood that he had found it, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to do anything. He decided to pretend that nothing had happened and try the spell again. He looked at the quill again, deciding to raise it six feet above the floor. It went about seven feet, but didn't hit the high ceiling. After letting it drop to the floor, he tried again, and it went about five feet.

He spent the next several hours recalibrating his magic, first with levitating, and then with other spells. The room creating dueling dummies that looked like Snape, and Harry worked on blasting them. The first few times he let himself concentrate, and ended up disintegrating them. After that he worked on how powerful a blast he would shoot. He then decided to try his shield. "Dobby, can you try stunning me?"

Dobby looked horrified, "No sir! Dobby is never attacking Harry Potter sir! Even if Dobby was wanting to, house elves isn't able to attack their masters!"

"But it would only be to test my shield. For practice."

"Dobby is understanding, and Dobby is sorry, but house elves is dying if they is attacking their master! If you is wanting to punish Dobby, Dobby is ready." A mallet appeared in Dobby's hand and the elf got ready to swing it at his own head.

"I'm not gonna punish you Dobby. I just didn't know. I guess I'll need someone else. Could you pop over to Hermione and see if she can help me practice dueling. If she's too busy, ask her if she knows if anyone from our group is available."

Hermione was studying in the library. With her research for Harry, she'd gotten a bit behind in where she wanted her studies to be (she was now only three weeks ahead). She knew the time spent on the Horcrux was more important than homework, but now that Harry was recovering, she thought she'd try getting caught up. A small pop in front of her got her attention. She had a shield up before she even looked to see Dobby in front of her. "Dobby," she whispered, "What are you doing here? Does Harry need something?"

"Yes, Miss Grangie," he said, bowing low, "Harry Potter is wanting his Grangie so he can be practicing dueling. If his Grangie is being too busy, he is asking who might be available to be helping him."

She sighed at the disruption to her studies, but then smiled that Harry thought he was ready to start dueling again. "It's ok. I'll help him. You can tell him I'll be right there."

"Yes, Miss Grangie," Dobby said saluting just before he disappeared.

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Fifteen minutes later, the door to the Room of Requirement opened, and Hermione walked into the room to find Harry standing nearby. He kissed her quickly. When they separated, he said, "I missed you."

She blushed slightly. "I missed you too, but I hope you didn't call me here to snog. Dobby said you wanted to duel."

"That's right. I wanted to start practicing my shield, but I don't have anyone to shoot at me. Dobby says he can't, so I needed someone." He then smiled at his girlfriend. "I'm very glad and thankful that you came."

She took a deep breath and said, "Ok. Defend yourself!"

He concentrated as he put up a shield as she blasted him with her weakest stunning spell. The shield held easily.

She smiled. "Good job. I guess I'll have to try harder." She then went through every hex she could do wandlessly, while Harry stood there (he was testing his shield, not his dodging ability). Nothing got past

his shield. He was smiling as she got frustrated to the point of taking out her wand. She then went through her arsenal of powerful spells as Harry kept his concentration until finally a powerful reducto barely got through the shield and caused a red mark on his left arm. His shield was back up a moment later. Hermione put down her wand. “I don’t know whether to be happy or mad. My shield can’t stand up to a reducto like that! But you can’t get used to it. If a reducto can get past it at all, so can the unforgivables. I think it’s time to see how well you can fight back.”

Soon Harry and Hermione were in an all out duel. Harry didn’t seem to be shooting as rapidly as before, but his spells were powerful when they hit, which fortunately wasn’t often as she was able to dodge. Harry kept his shield up, but kept dodging because he wanted to keep that ability. After about two hours they were both sweaty and exhausted. Hermione put up her hands, yelling, “Truce!”

“Sure. You realized I was about to beat you, so you needed a break. I understand.”

“Then why are you panting for air?”

“Because I need a break,” he answered with a smirk.

“Well,” said Hermione, “I think I’ve seen enough to evaluate your abilities.”

A chair appeared behind Harry and he sat down. “What did you think?”

The chair Harry was sitting in turned into a loveseat and Hermione sat next to him. “As we know, your shield is wonderful. We also know not to depend on it. Your reflexes are the same as they were, which is excellent. Your spells seem to be a bit more powerful than they were before, but it took you about three times as long to send them, which is why I was able to dodge most of them.”

Harry frowned. “My magical core is different now. It’s still hard to make my magic work. I suppose it’s like learning to write with your left hand when your right is hurt. Most people can manage it, but it doesn’t feel natural and requires more concentration.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “The only thing you can do is practice, practice, practice.”

“And that’s why you stopped our duel?”

“I thought we could use a snog break, and then I honestly think you should practice hexing a target as many times in a minute as possible.”

Harry smiled. “I like the idea of a snog break.”

“I thought you might.”

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On Monday morning, Harry and Dumbledore stood outside the door of Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. “Here we are,” said Albus cheerfully, “I believe you may be the first customer he’s had where your wand rejected you after purchasing it.”

When they walked into the shop, a bell rang. “Good morning, Mr. Potter, Professor Dumbledore,” said the old man with wide, pale eyes.

The headmaster spoke. “Might we have a bit of privacy?”

“Certainly,” said the proprietor, pointing his own wand at the door, causing it to say ‘closed’ and charming it so no one could eavesdrop.

“Now what can I do for you?”

“It’s about my wand,” said Harry nervously, “It...it won’t work for me anymore.”

He looked shocked. “Impossible. I personally sold you the holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, that was brother to You-Know-Who’s wand. It chose you. Wands don’t change their minds.”

Dumbledore answered. “We found that Mr. Potter’s scar had a curse that connected him to Voldemort, and we recently removed it. Once that was done, he could not perform magic with his wand anymore. We believe that the wand chose Harry because of that curse.”

"That's quite unusual, quite unusual. Do you still have the wand?"

"Yes," said Harry, pulling it out of his pocket.

Ollivander looked like Christmas had come early. "Yes, I see that the wand has rejected you. This has never happened before at this shop. You are indeed a tricky customer. Most curious. I guess the only choice we have is to start from scratch. You'll have to start trying wands."

Amazingly, Harry's wand was the second one Mr. Ollivander gave him to try. "Ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches. I believe this was the third wand you tried the last time you were here. It rejected you before, but now it appears to have chosen you. Curious."

"What's curious?" asked Harry timidly (something about this man made Harry nervous), "Apart from the fact that it rejected me before."

"That it is so short. It would seem that your magic needs less focus than most witch's and wizard's. You may even be able to focus enough to do some wandless magic. You-Know-Who needed an exceptionally long wand – thirteen-and-a-half inches. He, of course, took it as a compliment, and I never told him otherwise. The eleven inches of your previous wand was an average length. Your father used the same. Your mother's was slightly smaller – ten-and-a-quarter inches, but not this short."

Harry, remembering Ron showing off his new fourteen-inch willow wand with unicorn hair last year, had to stop himself from laughing, realizing that Ron did have trouble focusing on anything but chess and Quidditch. "Interesting," is what Harry decided to say.

Madam Pomfrey was extremely pleased with the results Harry got with his new wand, and said he was probably ready for classes now, but since the whole school knew Harry was going to be gone that week, and his magic was still a bit unstable, she allowed him to stay off the entire week. Moony, Padfoot, and Brooks had gone over their lessons with him over the weekend, so he already had their homework to do. Over the course of the week, Harry practiced using

both his wand and wandless abilities. He found that the new wand was lighter and easier to conceal. He also found that his spells were much more powerful when using his new wand. His spellcasting speed increased dramatically.

Before breakfast he'd have the normal training with everybody, although they were slightly easier on him at first. By the end of the week they were just as tough on him as always. While classes were in session, he would spend one hour with his wand, one hour doing homework, one hour without the wand, and another hour on homework. He'd then eat lunch and do the same thing again.

After dinner, he'd work with Hermione. First she'd tell him what he missed in class (aside from the three he'd already gotten), and then they'd work on his magic, and then they'd snog. She mentioned that his snogging ability had even improved now that Voldemort was no longer part of him. He wasn't sure how to take that comment.

When he got back to classes, whenever someone noticed his new wand, he'd claim he broke his old one. In truth, he kept it as a souvenir. He planned on hanging it in his room, along with the two wands he'd acquired from Snape. He didn't mention to anyone about what he'd learned about wand length, but he did notice that Hermione's was about nine inches. He was afraid she'd blurt that information out and insult half the students.

It wasn't long until Harry was taken out to what used to be the Quidditch pitch along with the other champions. After he was assured by Ludo Bagman that the pitch would be back to normal after the tournament, he learned that the third task was going to be a maze.

While they were leaving, Krum said, "Harry, I would like a word with you."

Harry chuckled at the chowderhead, knowing that Viktor was probably going to start trouble. "Sorry, I've got to see Hermione." He smirked at Viktor's scowl. "You know, according to Mr. Ollivander the wandmaker, shorter wands are better than long ones. Do you agree?"

Krum's face turned red as he realized the hidden meaning, and Harry could swear that smoke came out of his ears. "Vhy you...ow!" said

Krum. He had reached for his magic wand. As soon as he got it out, his feet were 'somehow' pulled out from under him. He fell on his wand, stabbing himself in the ribs until the wand snapped (and apparently a rib or two based off of how the Bulgarian 'champion' was acting).

Harry hadn't actually meant to hurt Krum, but couldn't stop himself from laughing. "You should really be more careful. I'll levitate you to the hospital wing." He then pulled out his wand and did just that before Viktor could protest, slowly floating him in the most crowded hallways going the long way as everyone watched, wondering what Harry had done to Krum.

When they got to Madam Pomfrey and she checked Viktor's injuries, she suspiciously asked Harry, "What happened?"

"We were talking and he got mad at me, so he pulled out his wand. Before he could hex me, he tripped and fell on it. After that I levitated him here."

"Vy you...OW!" Viktor shouted until his ribs hurt again.

Pomfrey looked at Krum. "Is that the truth?"

"He tripped me! I know it!"

"How?" asked Harry. "My wand was still in my pocket."

"I don't know how, but you did it!"

"If you want, we can put our memories into a pensieve," said Harry calmly, "and then we can prove that you pointed your wand at me and then fell from your own clumsiness."

Madam Pomfrey looked at Krum again, this time angrily. "If you pulled your wand first, Harry won't be in any trouble even if you did prove he somehow tripped you. I don't know how things are at Durmstrang, but here at Hogwarts that sort of behavior is not tolerated. Anyway, I'll have to make sure your wand didn't hurt any of your organs. I'd suggest that after you're recovered, that you pay Mr. Ollivander in Diagon Alley a visit. You may go now, Mr. Potter."



## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 44 – The Graveyard

The weeks passed quickly, and Harry got more and more used to his new magical core. Krum did get a new fifteen-inch wand from Ollivander's shop in Diagon Alley, and was glaring at Harry more than ever. When Harry explained how Viktor got hurt to Hermione, she was quite amused, and was glad that he was once again capable of tripping someone magically, although she admonished him to be more careful.

Before he knew it, Harry was eating breakfast with Hermione on the day of the last task. He was chewing a forkful of eggs when Professor McGonagall walked up to him.

“Potter, the champions are congregating in the chamber off the hall after breakfast.”

“But the task’s not till tonight!” said Harry, accidentally spilling scrambled eggs down his front, afraid he had mistaken the time.

“I’m aware of that, Potter,” she said. “The champions’ families are invited to spend the day here with them.”

“But Sirius is my only family, and he’s sitting at the staff table over there.”

“Someone has come to see you,” said McGonagall with a slight smile, glancing at Hermione, and walked away.

“Do you have any idea who came?” Harry asked his girlfriend. “Maybe if the Dursleys believed I was going to die, they’d come to watch.”

Hermione was slightly smiling but trying to control her expression. “There’s only one way to find out.”

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After he got through his breakfast and kissed Hermione goodbye, he walked to the room indicated by McGonagall to see who had come.

He saw Fleur with her parents and Viktor with his. He didn't miss the glare that the Krumns gave him when he entered. He then stopped dead in his tracks when he saw who had come.

A man with brown hair that was just starting to go grey was standing next to a woman with brown, bushy hair, just like Hermione's. Harry smiled broadly as he walked up to Hermione's parents. "Adam! Marissa! I had no idea you were coming! It's good to see you!" He shook Adam's hand and then Marissa pulled him into a hug.

"We told Hermione not to ruin our surprise," she said. "We called her last night and told her."

"She looked like she knew who was visiting."

"So," said Adam, "Hermione was right that your scar is a lot lighter now."

Harry took a deep breath. "Yes. I do feel a lot better without a piece of Voldemort inside me. Your daughter is absolutely amazing. Dumbledore didn't think it was possible to remove it, but she came up with a way five weeks after finding out about my problem!"

"We're very proud of her," said Marissa, "But we're also proud of you. That's why we're here today. To watch you become the youngest TriWizard champion that's ever been."

"At least according to Hermione no one younger has won before you," said Adam.

Harry blushed at the praise. "I haven't won yet," he said.

"But you've mopped the floor with the others for the first two tasks," pointed out Adam.

"So you've got a huge head start into the maze," said Marissa.

"You'll probably win the tournament before the others even enter the maze!"

Harry's face was red. "I don't know about that."

Harry gave the Grangers a tour of Hogwarts, even showing them the outside of the maze. Hermione was very happy, though not surprised, to see her parents at lunch. They spent time together chatting, and before long it was time for the final task.

As Harry stood near the entrance of the maze waiting for time to start, for a moment he felt his ward tell him a Death Eater was near, but then the feeling went away. He didn't have time to think about what to do about it because at that moment the whistle blew and Harry had to go into the maze. He was confident that he'd be able to fight any Death Eaters he ran across anyway, so he wasn't that worried. He pulled out his wand for show and started jogging into the maze, putting up his shield.

He found it quite easy to blast through any creatures he came across, even Hagrid's blast-ended skrewts as he quickly advanced in the proper direction, using his wand to point him every so often. He was momentarily slowed down by a boggart that showed Hermione being killed, but once he realized it, he turned Hermione into a plastic doll and laughed at the idea of mourning the death of a toy.

He came across a fog that looked weird so he used his wandless magic to move it away as he hurried through the maze. Using a powerful burst of magic, he blasted away a very surprised sphinx who ran off after one hit. Harry then saw a huge spider and remembered his anger at how Aragog had told his kids to eat him and Ron, and realized that this was probably one of the spiders that had attacked him. He incinerated the spider with his magic before it could attack. Then Harry caught sight of the cup. He went up to it and grabbed it confidently before he felt two separate sensations. He felt as though a stunning spell hit him in the hand that touched the cup, and as he passed out he felt a tug beneath his navel.

He awoke to find himself tied to a grave, with a sharp pain on his left palm. He saw a big snake crawling around. He smiled as he realized

he didn't have his glasses on, thankful that Hermione had healed his eyes. He also saw Barty Couch Jr. standing up, holding his arm that appeared to be missing a hand. Snape was also there, holding a sharp dagger that had blood on it, and was shaking drops of it into a huge cauldron. Harry healed his palm as he realized with fury that the blood was his. He thought he could probably handle this, but decided to make sure. He called for the only help he could, by rubbing the ring he was wearing on his right index finger with other fingers. This would alert Hermione that he needed help, and allow her to apparate as close as whatever wards (which he did detect) were in place would allow.

Before Harry could do anything else, he saw something he'd feared for a long time happen. Voldemort, complete with his red eyes and snake-like nose, rose out of the cauldron. Harry knew that he must be stopped. However, he waited for Snape to robe Riddle before deciding what to do. He watched Tom take his wand from Snape. As Voldemort pressed his wand to Snape's dark mark and other Death Eaters started arriving, he knew what he had to do.

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Hermione was proudly watching a magical screen that showed Harry advancing in the maze next to her parents, and saw that he'd reached the cup right after Fleur entered the maze. All of the sudden, Harry and the cup disappeared. She shouted, "Where'd he go!" Her parents had been trying to calm her down for about ten minutes when she felt a sensation she knew about, but had never actually felt. The ring Harry had given her was starting to burn. Harry was in trouble. She stood up, saying "Harry's in trouble," and tried apparating, only to find that as she already knew, you can't apparate on Hogwarts grounds. Without another word to anyone else, she started making her way down the stands as quickly as possible, intent on reaching the boundaries so she could apparate.

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Harry found he didn't have his wand, and decided that he'd have to just reveal his powers and hopefully put an end to this new war before it began. Without moving, Harry caused the ropes that were

around him to snap, gaining Voldemort's attention. As Tom pointed his wand at Harry, he shouted, "Leave him! He's mine!" just as the wand Tom was holding broke in his hand.

Voldemort's body was then thrown into Snape, who fell down while still holding the dagger right onto the snake, killing it as green smoke came from it. Harry grinned as he realized what that meant.

Voldemort hurriedly grabbed Snape's wand from him and faced his adversary just before being pulled up and turned upside-down while the Death Eater's watched. Voldemort finally shouted, "Kill him!" a moment before a blast from another direction killed Snape. The Death Eaters turned their attention to their immediate threat, leaving their master to deal with Harry Potter.

"You killed my father!" shouted Harry as Voldemort's wrist was twisted until it broke, causing him to drop Snape's newest wand. Tom screamed in pain. Harry continued, "You killed my mother!" Tom's other wrist broke as he was still hanging upside-down in midair. "You put a Horcrux in my head!" Voldemort's right foot broke. "Which by the way was removed and destroyed." Riddle's left foot broke.

"WWWWWhat?" said Riddle, stunned by the news.

"That's right, Tommy boy! Your diary, Slytherin's ring and locket, Hufflepuff's cup, my Horcrux, and you sixth one based off the smoke that came from your snake have all been destroyed!"

While Tom took this information in, Harry summoned him above the cauldron and dropped him in upside down, causing a large splash.

As Riddle quickly got his head out of there, Harry took control again and Voldemort was in the middle of the sky with his hands and feet in the positions to be crucified. Harry shouted, "If I don't kill you now, you're going to start a war to kill hundreds or even thousands of people!"

"No, we can join together and share power..."

Harry actually laughed. "Haven't you noticed yet, you don't have power anymore! You died fourteen years ago!" At that moment, while

feeling revulsion, yet resolution over what had to be done, Harry magically broke Voldemort's neck, causing instant death. Harry let Voldemort go and looked around him.

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Hermione finally got to the wards around Hogwarts, and apparated to the edge of a cemetery she'd never seen before. She looked around and saw a commotion in the middle, and guessed that Harry was part of it. She stopped for a moment and gasped as she saw someone who could only be Voldemort himself pushed into Snape. She hurried up, knowing that the other Death Eaters would soon join the so-called fight. She grinned to herself imagining how surprised Voldemort must be right now. She blasted Snape with a curse similar to reducto and turned her attention on the rest. She was so busy taking out the terrified Death Eaters that she missed the moment Tom got dropped into his cauldron. She dodged and ducked as death curses were shot at her, and took them all out, one by one, leaving no one alive to hurt anyone else. She had realized that this was Voldemort's inner circle who had bribed and lied their way out of prison before and were wanting to rejoin him. If they were left alive, they'd do the same things they'd already done.

When the last one had fallen, she looked around to see that Voldemort was now dead and Harry was standing, looking just as grim as she was feeling. She also noticed both Harry's wand and the TriWizard cup that had obviously been a portkey lying on the ground.

"Th-Thanks for coming, Mine. I was beginning to wonder if you were."

"I had to get out of Hogwarts' wards before I could apparate here."

"The cup stunned me and pulled me here. I must have woken up when Snape cut my palm. He was putting my blood in the cauldron Voldemort rose out of."

She sighed. "He didn't live very long in his new body, did he?"

"No. I didn't know what I'd be facing, so I rubbed my ring before I started fighting back."

“I’m glad you did.” She then gave a small smile. “I guess the prophecy’s been fulfilled.”

He smiled back. “I guess this means I can live now.”

“I guess we should take the cup back to Hogwarts.”

“After we gather these bodies together.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Hermione. “It might be better if we keep this a secret. You don’t want even more fame do you? Most people think Voldemort was already dead.”

“You’re right. Some people may claim that I made up the story if I tell what happened.”

“Let’s take away everybody’s wands and any other evidence of magic, including the cauldron, and make an anonymous call to the muggle police.”

“Just make sure I get Voldemort’s broken wand, and the one he has in his hand now, as well as my own. You can have the rest. Then I suggest you apparate back and I’ll take the cup back to Hogwarts.”

“You should go back now. I’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure Hermione?”

“Yes, Hero.” She gave him a quick kiss and He grabbed the cup and wound up back at Hogwarts for the celebration. Harry assured Hermione’s parents that she was safe as soon as he could. Hermione showed up about an hour later looking miserable. They spent the night in the common room holding each other once they escaped the party in the Great Hall. They decided to tell their group what really happened the next day.

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“Well,” said Dumbledore after Harry and Hermione finished telling their tale in Dumbledore’s office, “This is excellent news, and I do

agree that there is little point in panicking everyone by telling them Voldemort's back if he's already dead."

Hermione then spoke. "I also incinerated Voldemort because I thought his body might alert the muggles that something was wrong."

"Excellent. Now even if the ministry finds out, they'll only assume that the Death Eaters had gathered and fought amongst themselves," said Lupin.

Sirius smiled. "Perhaps they were trying to decide who would be their new leader."

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## More Important Than Any Broomstick – Chapter 45 – Epilogue

At breakfast on the morning the students would leave Hogwarts for the summer, the Potter Press had an interesting article on the front page. It showed a muggle photograph of the graveyard in Little Hangleton with the corpses of Death Eaters lying on the ground the way Hermione had left them.

“This must be one of the photos the muggle police or reporters took,” said Hermione. She then began reading the article.

*“Death Eaters Gather at Cemetery and Kill Each Other?*

*By Anna Jesse*

*Two nights ago, muggle police in the town of New Hangleton were anonymously informed by a woman using a telephone (muggle communication device) that there were several dead bodies in a local cemetery. After the woman insisted that she wasn't making a joke, and that there were unburied dead bodies of people who had just died there, the police investigated. What they found were a group of people in Death Eater outfits, which of course the muggles didn't identify. However, the Ministry of Magic has obtained the bodies and identified every single one of them as having been a wizard who had claimed to have done Voldemort's bidding only under the Imperius Curse nearly fourteen years ago, and therefore had been released from charges after their master's downfall. The Minister is fairly certain that this is the same group that caused the disturbance at the Quidditch World Cup last year. An interesting fact is that Voldemort's muggle father, Tom Riddle, is buried at the graveyard they were found at. What they were doing there or what happened to them is a mystery, although the grave of Voldemort's father appears to have been tampered with.”*

The article went on to name everyone that was found there, including Crabbe's and Goyle's fathers. When they were finished with the article, Harry said, “I wonder if he had my name entered in the tournament.”

“I don't think we'll ever know,” said Hermione.

“Who?” asked George, who was standing behind them.

“Oh,” said Harry surprised. “We were just wondering who entered me in the tournament.”

Fred and George shared a look. “I guess we can tell you now, Harry...”

“Since you won...” said George as Harry and Hermione began staring at the twins.

“...just like we knew...”

“...and bet that you would.”

“It was us,” they said together.

“What?” said Harry. “How?”

“With that remote-controlled helicopter you charmed for us,” said Fred.

“You even borrowed it on Valentine’s Day,” said George.

“We would’ve thought that you.”

“Or at least Hermione.”

“Would’ve figured that out by now.”

Harry and Hermione stared at each other, and then at the twins. Hermione finally spoke. “I would’ve thought you’d enter yourselves.”

“We did,” said Fred. “We put our names in, and then Harry’s.”

“We decided to let the goblet decide who the champion would be.”

“Once it picked you, we started betting.”

“Well, thanks for risking my life for your financial gain,” said Harry, secretly impressed by their ingenuity.

“Anytime,” said George. “By the way, did you lose your glasses in the tournament?”

“Because you haven’t been wearing them since you won.”

“Oh, yeah. You’re not the first people to ask. I ordered contact lenses.” Harry had decided to stop bothering with the glasses, but they decided to keep their involvement with the spell a secret. They planned on speaking to an Eye Healer this summer about it. “So how much did you make off of me?”

“We’d have to check our records,” said Fred.

“But it was quite a large sum,” said George.

“Then you should give Harry a percentage of your winnings!” said Hermione forcefully. “He doesn’t seem to mind what you did that much, but I do! After how much we already helped you with the muggle technology charms, too!”

“Hermione,” said Harry gently, “What’s done is done. Yelling at them won’t change anything. Besides, I did win.” He grinned at her, “and got the prize money.”

“Well,” said George, “We’ve got to finish packing.” They then left.

Hermione sighed and grinned back at Harry. “Oh well. I can’t believe they’re not finished packing yet.”

At that moment, Fleur Delacour walked up to them with her head down. “I wish to apologize for my behavior this year. I decided that I wanted ze famous ‘Arry Potter but found zat he waz taken. I should haff left it zer, but instead I tried to interfere with your relationship. I waz wrong to do zo, and am glad to zee that your relationship waz ztrong enough to withstand my azzault.”

Harry looked at Hermione, who nodded. “Alright.” He then shook Fleur’s hand.

The French girl said, "Oh by zee way, congratulationz on winning zee tournament. You are much more powerful than both Viktor and myself, even zo you are younger."

"Thanks," said Harry, and Fleur walked away from their table.

"Harry," said Hermione, "We should say goodbye to our teachers now."

"Alright," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I've got a question for Dumbledore anyway."

They young couple first walked up to Dumbledore. "Headmaster," said Harry, "Are you still planning on training us this summer?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled madly at him. "If you're both still interested, absolutely. Despite the fact that we no longer face the threat of Voldemort, I believe that passing down knowledge to the next generation is vital to our world. Besides, you never know if another dark wizard like Voldemort will attempt to gain power. Although it's not normal to take on two apprentices at once, I believe that you are exceptional people. I'd like you both to become my apprentices. Our studies will take four hours per day, five days per week until the middle of August, but by then I believe you will both have learned everything I wish to teach you, provided that you put forth the same effort that you have been into your studies. Professor McGonagall has been very impressed with you both as well." Albus smiled as his eyes twinkled. "She has already submitted the Gryffindor prefect recommendations, although I am not allowed to say who they were," he said with a wink.

A huge grin formed on Hermione's face. "Really?" she asked excitedly, "Of course you can't answer that."

Harry smiled to see his girlfriend so excited. "Thank you, Headmaster. We'll see you next Monday." They then talked briefly to Hagrid, McGonagall, and others, until finally they decided to get their stuff out of Gryffindor Tower.

As they were headed out of the Great Hall, they both saw Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle walking toward them with evil looks in their eyes.

Suddenly the three Slytherins fell backwards as though pushed as Harry and Hermione smiled at them."

"I know you cheated in the tournament, Scarhead!" Draco hissed when he stood up (blaming his bodyguards for the fall) and dusted himself off with a grin that quickly went away as he lost control of his bladder. He then ran off, followed by his stooges.

Chuckling, Harry walked with his girlfriend as they headed toward Gryffindor Tower to collect their trunks. "So, I suppose we'll have to continue our workouts every day."

"Yes," said Hermione, "Now that we've gotten in shape it would be a shame to lose that."

"And we'll also have to do homework."

"Of course. Not to mention Quidditch practice," said Hermione.

"You know," said Harry with a huge smile, "Even though I played with you a lot last summer, it still seems amazing to hear you say that."

She blushed. "I haven't been on a broom since August, so it's easy to forget. I'm going to have to practice if I want to make the team as a Chaser next year."

"Something about that idea makes me want to pull you into a broom closet and snog you senseless."

"Then why don't you?" she said seductively.

Thirty minutes later, a disheveled-looking Harry and Hermione entered Gryffindor Tower to find Neville and Ginny snogging passionately in the Common Room. They grinned and walked up to their dormitories, deciding to leave the couple in peace.

When they got onto the Hogwarts Express, Neville, Ginny, Harry and Hermione began their search for a compartment. Professors Black and Lupin were portkeying to Potter Manor, but Harry decided to take the train because of a certain prank Harry, Hermione, Neville, and Ginny had planned during the ride. After finding several places full, they finally found that the last compartment only had two people. Ron Weasley and Susan Bones were snogging passionately, apparently oblivious to everything that was going on around them.

Hermione and Neville blushed, but Harry whispered, "Let's sit down here and see how long it takes them to realize that they're not alone."

Ginny whispered with a grin, "As long as they don't go too far."

The four of them managed to put their trunks away and sit across from the couple without disturbing them. They'd even set up a prank for Malfoy, whom they knew would be kind enough to pay them a visit soon. After they'd been there ten minutes, the door opened again, revealing Draco and his goons. Harry caused a bucket that was being levitated to turn upside down when they stepped forward.

Ron and Susan broke apart blushing when Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle yelled as some type of liquid spilled all over them. Hermione then made them fall into each other because the potion required physical contact.

"Crabbe, Goyle," said Draco passionately, "I love you both!"

They both looked at him with lust in their eyes. "We love you too, and we also love each other." They got up and walked out the door side by side with Draco in the middle. Draco had one hand on each of their bums while they each had a hand on his.

As the door was closing, they saw Draco kiss each of them quickly and stop at the next compartment to announce happily, "I want everyone on the train to know that Crabbe, Goyle, and I are in love!" They then walked to every other compartment on the train doing the same thing.

Everyone in Harry's compartment was laughing. Ron said, "Whatever that potion was guys, it was brilliant!"

“Thanks,” said Hermione.

“How long will that last?” asked Susan.

“Until every person on this train has heard them declare their love,” said Ginny giggling.

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About an hour later, the group knew that everyone had been told of Malfoy’s romance by how loudly he was yelling. When he got near their compartment, he screamed (without touching the door), “I’ll get you for this, Potter!” before he and his ‘lovers’ quite obviously lost control of their bowels in the hallway of the Hogwarts Express, as far away from the bathroom or their compartment as they could get.” They ran off.

“That was cruel,” said Hermione, although she was chuckling.

“They deserved it,” said Harry. “If they’d just leave us alone I would leave them alone.”

“That’s not what I meant,” she said. “I meant forcing everyone on the train to smell that.”

“Not to mention hear their noises,” said Susan looking somewhere between amused and offended.

“I admit the smell is foul,” he said, holding his wand and cleaning the air. “Is that better?”

“Much,” said Hermione. “I wonder if those three will ever figure out that you’re doing that to them.”

“Never,” said Harry with a grin. “If they did, Malfoy would have to realize that I know spells he’s never heard of. Since I’m a half-blood, that’s impossible.”

Everyone laughed at that comment.

"You'd think that by looking at Crabbe and Goyle, he'd realize that being pureblood doesn't make you a good wizard," said Ron.

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When the train ride was over, Harry and Hermione met Sirius and the Grangers.

Adam said, "I read the paper about those mysterious deaths at the cemetery in Little Hangleton," with a smirk. "They think it was some sort of cult that did a ritual suicide."

"They're right," said Sirius. "Trying to hold Harry captive is a form of suicide."

"I guess you won't have as busy a summer as last year," said Marissa.

"Er, actually, it's going to be pretty busy," said Hermione.

"We're going to both be taught by Dumbledore, four hours a day, five days a week," said Harry, "until our vacation at the end of summer."

"But why?" asked Adam. "With Voldemort gone, you don't have to worry about that prophecy. I know that you both can handle yourselves against the occasional crazy attacker."

"I know, but I think it's good to learn as much as we can. It's also an honor to be Professor Dumbledore's apprentices," said Hermione.

Harry added, "Besides, you never know when the next dark wizard will show up."

The End.

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Please review. Thank you for reading (and reviewing) this story. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have. It's hard to believe that this began as a one-shot. After reading HBP, I came to the conclusion that Voldemort is nothing more than a coward who made Horcruxes because of his fear of death. He's a good duelist, but can't stand up

to a really powerful wizard like Harry is in this story. In GoF, Harry was severely outclassed, but in this story, Tom was.

The long-awaited sequel to this story is now up. It is called *Harry Potter and the Muggle-born Uprising*.

The Wizarding World faces an even greater threat than Voldemort – a civil war led by a dark lord from the past. As with ‘Broomstick,’ this story is set ten years later than canon. Therefore, it begins in 2005 instead of 1995, the summer before Harry and Hermione start their fifth year at Hogwarts. Remember that in the previous story, they found a way to power technology with magic.

I am coauthoring this story with zeropolis79.